

A GRAY DREAM

WOLCOTT



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A GRAY DREAM



# A GRAY DREAM

AND OTHER STORIES OF  
NEW ENGLAND LIFE

BY

LAURA WOLCOTT

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*TWO VOLUMES IN ONE*

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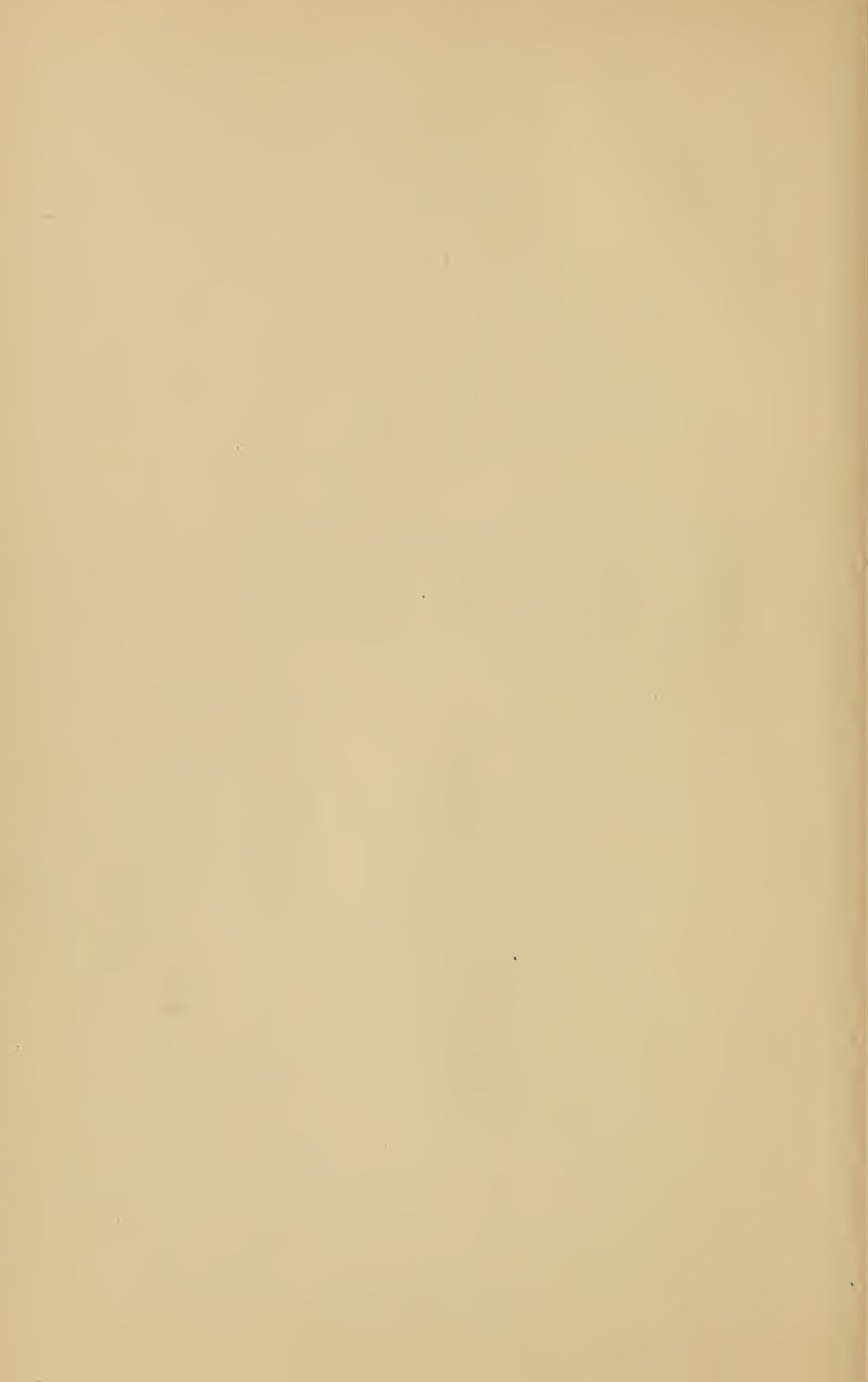
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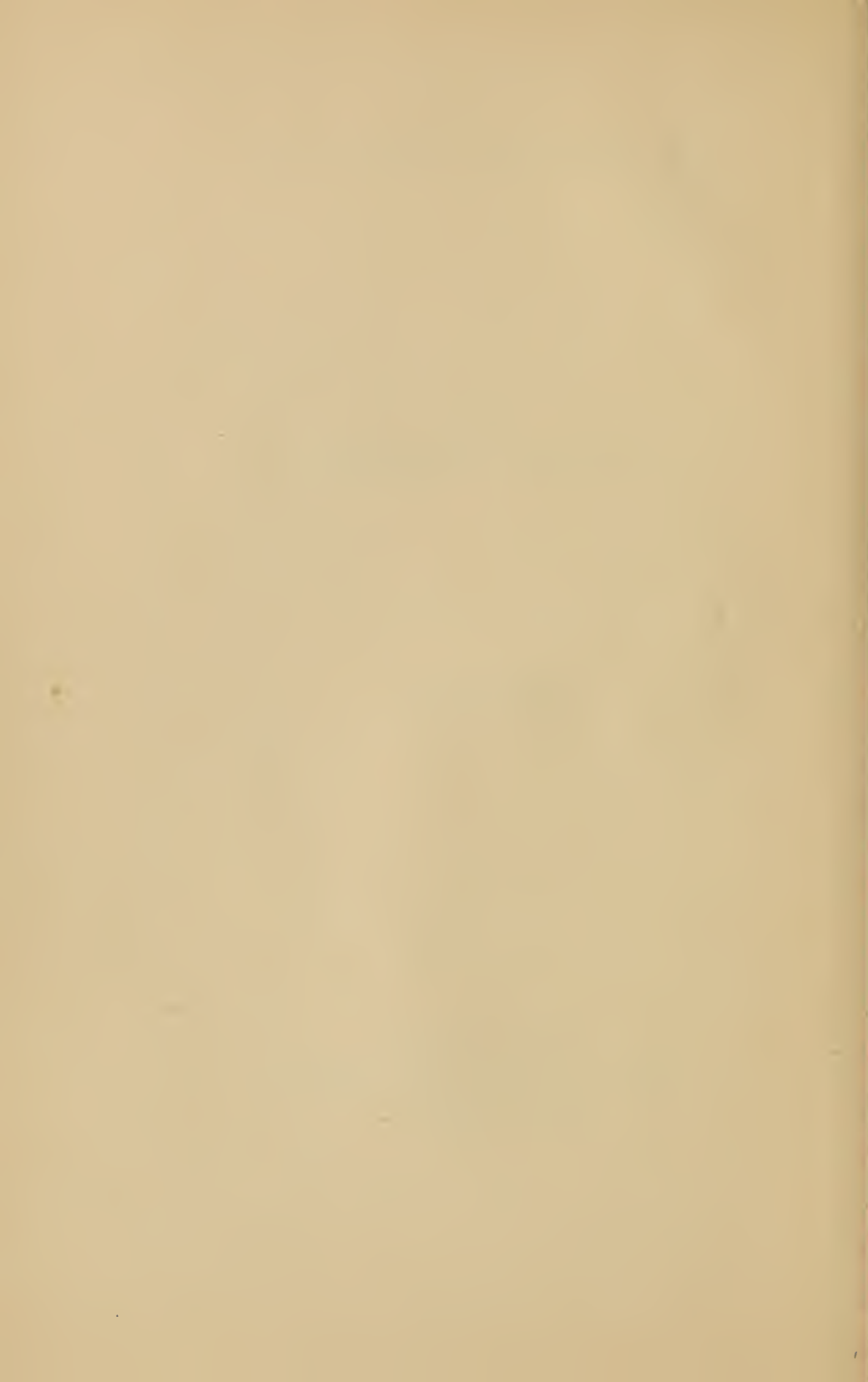
A GRAY DREAM

BY  
LAURA WOLCOTT

*VOLUME I*

NEW HAVEN  
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
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## INTRODUCTION

THE group of sketches and stories that make up this volume are chiefly of New England in former days. Their author knew New England, not as an onlooker, but as a partaker of its life, which she shared for more than eighty years. But while she delighted in its manner of speech and all its little daily ways, she saw its life also in the light of a large setting; as a child wandering out into the morning sees its own familiar little places bright with the hopes and adventures of a great world. In these stories meagre, unknown lives, hidden away among the New England hills, narrowed and hampered in many a way, give out their own note of joy and triumph. To one with seeing eyes, who knows what has gone into the making of such lives, and under what great skies all lives dwell, they shine out, like the papers in the box labeled "signal failures," touched with vitality and beauty,—part of the great heart of things.

E. E. M.

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"My fireplace glowed with fragrant applewood embers, sending up spires of flame as I thrust in the poker. I took up sheaf after sheaf of papers from my large box labeled 'Signal Failures,' but they would not drop of their own accord. As my inward gaze stared into the very heart of these sketches they came forth bright and keen, very phoenixes from their ashes to be. The days ran trooping back when I had sat at my desk with sleet rattling on my window, or the 'soft-footed snow'; when I had wandered later under the apple trees in bloom and taken to heart earth's unstinted gifts. I could see June's exquisite pink and whiteness, feel along my nerve footpaths the tingle of its fragrance; hear the robin's pre-empting cry as he took possession of a crotch above cat-reach; and the memory of it held my hand.

"No one suspects that this battered body of ours will rise with all its scars, its vestiges of defeat. If I brighten my room with the fitful blaze of my heart that I hold in my undecided hand, shall I create a new spring, a real resurrection from these outworn leaves?

"Here is a page just rescued from a curling

tongue of flame that licked at it greedily. How happy I was over the writing! How thoughts came circling around my theme like homing pigeons, crowding wing on wing! I will keep this—just this one more, I said, as the flame crept serpent-like over my logs, and soaring upward carried me victorious, above smoke and ashes. Yes, I will keep this; and I laid its somewhat charred edges tenderly away down in the bottom of the box.

“Then came another, written in perfect sunshine when a bit of good news came flying to me by wire; news altogether too good to be true. The joy, the rapture of life was in every line of it. That must not die. My very hopes would shrink in the flame that consumed it; my desires fall into ashes.

“I put them back, one by one. And I locked the box with decision.

“Securities they are supposed to be by the unenlightened; stocks and bonds, notes and deeds. Securities they are; spiritual bonds and deeds. They are a part of my life; the blood of my veins; the tension of nerve and muscle; the systole and diastole of my heart. Useless to any other, they have borne me on

wings over hard places; they have given me tears of joy, exquisite memories, immortal hopes. The old label shall become futile ashes, and in the place of *Signal Failures* I will write *Glorious Successes*."



## THE EMBARRASSMENT OF YEARS

BUT why should you make visits?" the Nice Young Person said. "At your time of life why not let your friends come to you instead?"

What is my time of life? The phrase is superfluous. "Impertinent?" you ask. Oh, not from my friendliest Nice Young Person! But really—

*At my time of life?* I can go up many flights of stairs—with landings. I climb hills also, with the added pleasure of pausing to view the landscape, which younger people miss.

I remember dates, and people's names, and current events; and the past is no more charming to me than the present, except that it was in itself more charming.

I can weed flower beds, even like Celia Thaxter of vivid memory, at Appledore. I love all human kind from soft babyhood for play to hard age withering and waiting to be consoled.

My time of life! I can thread needles. Points may come first, in the exasperating way of modern needles, but in time—

I can read into the small hours of the morning and then lie down to cheerful dreams or dreamless sleep like a babe on its mother's breast.

I can thrill to bird songs, from the exultant wood thrush's freedom song to the lonesome whippoorwill's complaint.

I love the meanest flower—yes, weed—that blows. It does not suggest thoughts too deep for tears. All my thoughts are of the exquisite bliss of living. If sunshine have its charm, so has the rain. Was it not Elizabeth Stuart Phelps who deplored the old hymn sung on pitiless July Sundays?—

No midnight shade, no clouded sun,  
But sacred, high eternal noon.

I go out into my dewy garden and watch every seed that sends up from the mystery below two tiny leaves like to the far-away spread of bird wings against the blue; just two crooked lines full of expectation.

"Fine salads some day," says the Nice Young Person, peering for the tiny growth and trying to look sympathetic.

Some day? Perhaps. But my life is in the Now. What are green-white curly leaves under

Lucca oil and lemon juice with talkative folk about the table but ministers to a lower sense? The spirituality of the salad lies in its Antæan touch—its slow sucking out of disreputable earth that which lifts its head to the skies.

From my south window I watch a wobbly robin tilting on a Norway spruce limb against the high wind; shifting its clinging feet, half-spreading foolish, untried wings that know no joy of the air, only terror of the earth. Under the dull, ruffled feathers a timid heart, pea-size, quakes up and down as the branch flies; a wide bill opens to let out "*yes, ma'am, yes, ma'am,*" trailing off in quick "*'s ma'ams*" as the high wind wrestles with the tree—as if remembering its promise to sit still till mother came, forced to break the letter, but keeping the spirit, and sustained by a quivering hope.

Gladly would I fetch the looked-for worm, except that courtesies of the sort are apt to be misunderstood even in human society. And the swaying limb is high. Ah, the mother is returning with her prey, delved for successfully in the richness of my lawn. Both their cups of bliss are full; the mother's with service, the baby's with being served.

I can see them as plainly as I could—a certain number of years ago. And the joy of it all is greater by far. In youth one's eyes focus on larger things and the mind follows.

For reading I confess to glasses, though headings and posters are still clear to the unhelped vision.

At my age indeed!

Now that I think of it, my Nice Young Person does come to see me very often. She is always welcome, as she well knows; but a sudden suggestion from an over-sensitive mind that it is to spare me sends the blood back to my heart!

(Why did I meanly think of that?)

To be sure, she always takes my elbow and says, "Here are four steps," when she comes out of an unaccustomed house with me. Does she think I cannot count as well as the crow? "Two, but not three," the legend says. Why not four? And do I not know the feel of mother earth, of stepmother pavement, as my foot touches it? Why say, "Now you are down!" with an offensive hint of superior sense?—as if one would naturally stay up and not know it!

On traveling days, why do car conductors

grasp me by an arm that is seldom free from bruised finger-marks and always painful at the time? And on a street car, why will no one allow me to ride backward—my own choice? They rise alarmingly, embarrassingly, to a man, to a woman even, and leave me the forward privilege. If I decline it seems ungracious after all their inconvenience. So the wind blows in my face instead of being tempered by the window back of the motorman.

I can cross a crowded street at my age (!) quicker than my younger friends and escape daredevil automobiles while they are holding me back by one elbow in the very forefront of danger.

"If I hadn't been here!" the Nice Young Person gasps. Yes, my dear, if you hadn't I should have been safely across in time to escape the odious, smothering blast in the trail of the monster.

"Be sure you step in the *middle* of the canoe," they say, when we go out on the lake. Yes, two or three say it at once. A well-meant but discourteous chorus. Why, I knew that before they were born! I always step in the exact middle. I balance, adjust myself, sit down

discreetly. Long practice has made me perfect. There is something to be said in favor of the flight of time. Yet I know that behind my back, with raised eyebrows they are saying "Wonderful!" or its equivalent in polite pantomime.

I commiserate Methuselah with all his descendants;—even more, dim, pathetic old Priam with a son to set him right at every turn. "Father, the predictions are that there will be a flood. Don't go out in sandals. And do be careful of the heavy dew at your time of life! Here are your highest pattens; don't forget." Or, "The Greek arrows are so swift, the chariots rush along at such a mad pace—and you know you don't see as far as you once did!" Poor old heroes! Better Abel dying in his young beauty by the altar that blazed so well—a comely sight; better splendid Hector, his plume bedraggled, laid on his lofty funeral pyre!

But no! Ah, no!

"Whom the gods love die old"; full of the wealth of years and deathless memories. At my time of life the world is ripe fruit to be tasted with zest, its juices concentrated, its



acridity turned to sweetness. *Poor young Abel! Poor young Hector!*

My age—whatever it may be—is but the lengthening record of delectable days; of happy summers with sunshine and June roses; of cosy hearth-fires and soft snowfalls, muffling all harsh sounds, and a world diamonded with ice; a record of more thrills and ecstasies than callow sixteen so much as dreams of.

In my indiscriminating youth I was terribly afraid of people. Now I find them no more alarming than myself. As for my years, they jog on merrily and keep no count.

I know now that there are horizons beyond horizons.

But my Nice Young Person is limited, dear soul! by the things she sees and hears, the multitudinous things she knows. Always beyond her depth in the salt sea of promiscuous charities, committees, clubs, schemes for the heathen who will soon send missionaries to teach us respect and veneration, projects for the amelioration of man—what weary years she must wait, till at my age she may possibly sit down with her life a-cool, and rest it, and see the belated glory of it all.



## RACHEL ELIOT

WHEN I say that Rachel Eliot stood alone at the end of a long line of divines, I trust I shall not be misunderstood by a later generation.

We have all seen pictures of the divine of the past, in no way related to the clergyman, minister, priest or parson of today. He was tall and spare, with nerve but no nerves, and with less muscle than intellect. His forehead was high rather than broad; his face a long oval, his nose and lips thin; and his color came from the fireside and his mug of hot flip.

When his picture was made he sat at his table pen in hand, his Bible open before him, and one long, thin finger holding the leaves apart at the Decalog. His neckcloth, unnaturally white, ended in two tabs, thus stamping his profession upon him like a seal. He did not look like a fighting parson; but a difference of opinion on a given point, or a sudden invasion of Indians, was enough to bring the warrior's quality to the fore.

And the subject of the miniature lying before me—the meekest divine of them all—kept his flintlock under the pulpit cushions. But that was away back in the dim past, near the top of the ladder that reached like Jacob's ladder to heaven, and had landed many generations safely beyond the skies.

Poor Rachel on its lowest rung had cut off high hopes all unaware—though in time she was to know it and feel her own inopportune-ness. In a word, Rachel Eliot was a distinct disappointment. Not one whit more fervently did the mother of little Samuel desire a son of the Lord than did the Puritan wife of Parson Eliot; never could she have been a woman of more sorrowful countenance than was this godly mother when denied by the inopportune coming of a daughter who in all innocence put a period to the apostolic succession.

To say that Madam Eliot was indignant—that she was tempted to doubt the ways of Providence—is to say very little to the point; without doubt the tears shed over the bright head of the offending babe were bitter as waters of Marah. But such being the will of God there was nothing to be said about it, even if

the rebellious thinking kept on. Was not discipline the common lot, not only to be endured but to be given thanks for, as an earnest in some uncomprehended way of salvation?

Mrs. Beams, the elder deacon's wife, smiled sanctimoniously at the dolorous length of Mrs. Eliot's face when Rachel was presented at the altar of Whitley church for baptism, and Mrs. Eliot was aware of it. Worst of all, like insult superadded to injury, Rachel was an only child—the child of old age. It was little she who had given occasion to many to look down on godly Parson Eliot, whose sad heart had been securely set upon a worthy son to succeed him. Would Rachel have proved such a son in her parents' eyes if their prayers had been answered? I often ask, looking back on the old days. But that is neither here nor there.

Rachel was.

And when her mother stopped apologizing for her, when she was too tall to have her ears boxed, too strong to be shut into a closet—the ways of Providence were past finding out.

Far back of my day—of our young days—Rachel had been sent or suffered to go to a proper seminary for young ladies in a college

town, where a maternal aunt was supposed to rule with a rod of iron and to be expert in the use of lock and key.

How it happened no one knows, but it is true—for I once saw the pretty, white satin slippers—that Rachel Eliot by some means went to a commencement ball and danced all night, or nearly all, with the long-haired, high-stocked, unregenerate youth of the day. It made a terrible scandal in Whitley that was not hushed up any the sooner because it was the parson's daughter. How or where she had learned to dance, at a period when dancing was considered an ungodly amusement, I cannot say, for no one seemed to know. It was not for lack of prying; this only I am sure of. I always thought it came by nature, as flying does to winged creatures. But if the parson and Mrs. Eliot knew, they did not choose to tell; and as for Rachel, she held her young head so high that the bravest quailed and fell back before the light of her eyes when they ran to ask her.

After this, on February fourteenth, strange letters passed through the postmaster's hands, addressed with many curlycues to Miss Rachel Eliot. Perfumed and belaced they were, with

doves and hearts and arrows quite lavishly displayed, and worst of all, with little heathen cupids on the great wax seals; but not all the candles in the inner room of the post office revealed the iniquity within the covers.

If Rachel's father had not died about that time, the matter might have come up in church conference. But Mrs. Eliot had a high head also, and signified in answer to impertinent questions that Rachel was her own and that she was still competent to take care of her; which the community accepted with much salt, and went its way to wonder, defeated temporarily.

It was about this time that Rachel came to belong to us youngsters. Just how it began I cannot say; but one of my earliest recollections is of a tall lady, full grown and therefore old, like our mothers, sweeping down like a sudden breeze upon the little schoolhouse under the hill as soon as its four o'clock doors opened, and carrying all before her. We went with her hilariously, as we would have followed the will-o'-the-wisp or the Pied Piper.

Sometimes we picked daisies on the hill and crowned her with awkward little wreaths, and

she said not a word about the midges that tickled her ears and ran down her neck in spite of all our brushing. Sometimes we filled the little baskets she made for us of leaves or reeds, with wild strawberries, with huckleberries or blueberries in their season, or gathered chestnuts, when she pulled the burr prickles out of our fingers and kissed the place; or made acorn cups and played at tea party with mallow-cheeses for cake; or sailed paper boats in the brook and caught imaginary fish with a bent pin and a string. How well I remember to this day the grief of Benny Clews when his little brother died, that the poor little fellow never had a real fishhook!

When winter came we all slid down hill together, and one special noon, when the teacher had gone home to dinner, it was Rachel who suggested dragging out a long bench, turning it upside down, filling it with children, and trying the crust back of the meeting house. She steered, I well remember; for not a boy of them all dared, and two or three were pretty big. It was a hill of glass, covered with snow upon snow and sleet upon sleet, and at last polished to perfection by a fine rain that froze



as it fell. Oh! it was a maddening joy, worth all the bumps and strains, all the after-aches and black-and-bluenesses not reported at home. But some sneak told; and the story flew like wildfire that Rachel Eliot piled all the boys and girls on a bench upside down, steering by two of its legs, and that it struck a bumper and rose in the air, and the legs came out with Rachel clinging to them, one in each hand, and that they all rolled and bumped and bounced to the bottom together, bench and all, scared to death, and a mercy they did not all get killed in a heap.

This was town talk for so long that it quite obscured the former story of Rachel's climbing to the belfry, which had grown shaky with age, to rescue an unhappy kitten clinging outside in deadly peril, a feat which no one else offered to attempt.

A scandalous creature was Rachel Eliot in those days, when the elders thought her a forward, overgrown child to be punished; and we, an old lady to be worshiped. Not that one of us really thought her old, except that like our mothers she had stopped growing. She must



have been about twenty-one then, and had left off black dresses for her father.

The fourteenth of February came in vain now; for the golden college youth of her day had borne off and probably framed their precocious sheepskins, and were writing laborious briefs or compounding mysterious drugs in high-smelling laboratories, or musing over fifthlies and sixthlies in country sitting-rooms, even perilously leading flocks of their own in the way they should go before fairly knowing the path themselves.

But all this we may safely leave to them, and return to stately Miss Rachel, who had a way of asking our little flock to tea at the parsonage. This was no simple five o'clock affair of the present century, but high tea, where all sat at table, on chairs a little too low for the majority, and only the elders were quite at ease; where thin slices of pink ham and tongue held places of honor on shining damask, and creamed potatoes kept them worthy company; where flaky, hot tea-biscuit, and golden butter and still more golden honey in the comb, made by real bees beside the mignonette beds in the parsonage garden, not done to order with

a creditable bee dropped in for affidavit, had high though subordinate place; where fragrant loaf cake and frosted cup cakes, ring crullers and snowy sugared doughnuts tempted appetites that good digestion waited on loyally. If in some rare case a dose of home picra coming in a generous cup at bedtime supplemented the feast, was it not worth it all,—the face one made, the nauseous final gulp with starting tears? For did not our Rachel in all her glory of befrilled muslin sit at the foot of the table, her curly hair making a halo round her head, beguiling us with fairy stories, tucking sly pink-and-white peppermints into our pockets, and all under the sharp eyes of Madam Eliot, in a cap with streamers and a false front, sitting grim and forceful at the head of the table. Here she said grace and added as if it had been part of it, "Don't eat fast, and mind your manners," fixing some unlucky urchin with a severe eye which we felt to be symbolic of the eye of Providence. Warnings against scuffing our feet or leaving our spoons in the teacup, which sounded ominous long after in the stillness of night and the dark, were robbed of terror at the time by some absorbing, frisky

little story of "How the Chipmunk Lost His Tail," or "When the Hoot-Owl Took Singing Lessons."

How Rachel played at hide-and-seek in the garret with us on cold Saturdays when we were released from our five days' bondage, when the snow settled softly on the window ledges or was driven past like a tramping army by the wind "keening" round the chimney! Nobody could hear what we did then, no, not if we shouted; and some of us, shaky in our knees, and unable to do anything with our fast-growing, superfluous hands and feet, went gaily to the Virginia Reel with no thought of its sinfulness, and even learned the polka steps and forgot the pokerish quality of our muscles then and forever.

Soon our understandings began to grow too; and once somebody in a dark corner whispered that Rachel Eliot had a "follower," according to Sally-in-the-kitchen; and wondering mouths took it up, and clumsy fingers wrote it on a slate and weren't quick enough to rub it out, and so had it paraded before the tittering school till the teacher, who had considered it only as an ordinary communication, looked

again, and returned the obscured record, expressing herself with the ferrule.

But even as "a baby is a poor thing to hide with," a secret once let loose is as water spilled on the ground that cannot be gathered up again. We went less often to the parsonage now. Our playmate was not quite all our own, and old lady Eliot looked at us suspiciously, we thought, as if we had done it.

It was nobody's fault but his, and why did he do it? He was a harmless enough elderly person in our eyes, graduated from college some four or five years before the valentine period when great envelopes with decorated borders, hearts and darts and Cupid seals in great splashes of red wax came to Miss Rachel Eliot. He wore a high stock with a great bow, and shining boots, and his hair came down on his coat collar, while his whiskers—ah, but they didn't look as they would in this year of grace, and nobody thought of jeering at them.

Once, as we were saying good-night at the door after a special feast, we ran into a big man with his hand on the knocker, and nearly upset him, and giggled as we picked ourselves up, for it was some one or two of us who really

fell. And there was an awful rumor whispered about next day but not confided this time to any treacherous slate, that the last one out, little freckled Sammy Coles, had heard Mrs. Eliot, who was growing deaf, say in an awful voice, "Rachel, here comes your gentleman farmer."

What that might be none of us knew, but it sounded unlawful; and though we put our brains together like the game of consequences, as it were, the result was zero. But this creature-whatever, though he looked very much like any man not a minister, had taken away and lost to us our Rachel Eliot, and it was a long time before we saw her properly again.

Sally-in-the-kitchen waylaid us sometimes as we lingered past the door, and whispered that "He kep' a-comin'," or that "She don't relish it"; which we understood to mean Madam Eliot; or that "Rachel, she never see the day she didn't do what she set out for"; or "Lawsey! She'll get him yet"; all of which was weird and unbelievable to ears immature and of small experience in love affairs. We used to peep out behind our elders in the aisle to see Nathaniel Giles offer his arm to our Miss Rachel

.

at the church door and walk composedly with her across the green in the face of the entire congregation, and as solemnly walk away after leaving her at the parsonage door. It was well understood in Whitley, where everybody knew every other body's thoughts, that he was not made welcome inside, where old lady Eliot, a good deal crippled by rheumatism and therefore debarred from church services, sat in her elbow chair of state, a stout hickory stick by her side.

One of us wondered aloud once at the alluring kitchen door if she ever corrected our Rachel with it; but Sally rattling away at the dishes whispered, "She dassent!", which was final and set our perplexed thoughts at rest. So we had still greater respect for our idol. And as we grew older, strangely enough she grew younger; and many a consultation we held at recess or on the way home from school as to the reason of this. Since then the flying years have landed us on the same levels.

But at that time the breeziness was not all gone, though it was no longer a tornado that caught and carried us away in its vortex but an exquisite west wind that sought and

.



gathered us in little whorls like loosened leaves still green, and set us down again where the diversions were tales and poems, songs and Border ballads. Figuratively, she gently drew away our morbid reading, the sad tales of early death and precocious piety, and inspired us with deeds of valor and chivalry and greatness. We never questioned how she knew these things; but just as she had made the boys kind to the weak, thoughtful for the old, and courteous to all—things that perhaps came more by nature to the girls—she told us that we must belong to the aristocracy of letters. At first we turned one to another in wonder, for she never explained; and presently the truth dawned upon us as it never does when expressed in a mathematical formula.

Occasionally our walks led past Nathaniel Giles's tidy garden where he pottered among his flowers and trained his vines, and we began to see, though dimly, why he was called the gentleman farmer, with a little note of superiority in the tone of those who were not afraid to do their own farming. It was a rather disgraceful thing for a man to go a-fishing in haying time or when harvests should be gath-

ered in, and argued something lacking in the man. A college education was supposed to be in some way responsible for this falling away from ancestral tradition. It was all well enough for a parson, but a man—

Still we admired and held our breath and went by on tiptoe whenever Nathaniel Giles rose above our horizon with rod in hand, and book beside him, though other men were doing the work of the farm. Sometimes we wondered to each other why he didn't marry Rachel,—dash across the green on a foaming red roan steed, snatch her up in the saddle and be off and away ere the break of day, or old lady Eliot had time to reach her stick.

Sally-in-the-kitchen said, in those days when we were not a bit ashamed to listen, that many's the time she heard the mother tell Rachel that Eliot was too good a name to change for Giles that didn't come over in the Mayflower or anything else, likely; and when Rachel insisted on her right, the reply was always the same, "If you will have your own head, wait till I'm gone, for it's more'n I can a-bear." And though Madam Eliot was a purist in speech, and Sally but an indifferent reporter, being cut off from



school privileges in early youth, we sensed it, as she often said, and went away pondering.

Presently we grew up in the same amazing way that our children do now, without observation, like the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and drifted off to school or farm or merchandise—always belonging to Rachel Eliot, who dominated the town of Whitley and made what she would of its young. She might not have done better if she had been a real divine in straight line of descent. But what she did was once for all. If we proved poor workmen it was not from any flaw in the tools she put into our hands and taught us to use.

I was the youngest of the little group so early swept away from the schoolhouse under the hill to that other education of Life, the greatest of all schoolmasters. And thus it came about that I was still in town and much at the parsonage when Nathaniel Giles was rumored to have had a "stroke."

"Now will the old lady say, 'Wait till I'm gone,' I wonder?" was Sally's greeting, as I stole softly to the kitchen door dreading to hear that it was true. And there Rachel Eliot found me, and drawing me close to her whis-

pered in a voice that seemed to belong to another world, "Stay with mother till I come back."

It was not an altogether pleasant duty. But one of the first lessons of our later school is that pleasure and duty seldom go hand in hand. So I waited on the stern old lady hour after hour, found her glasses, set her stick beside her, read in her Bible to her—it was in Judges, I remember—chapters of her own choosing, and longed with all my heart to have Rachel come back. Imperative duties at my own home had been set aside as of no consequence in the face of probable death and instant needs of the living.

It was dusk, just turning to evening, with a slender horn of moon in the sky, I well remember, when Rachel came, serene and high in spirit. She did not see me but went straight to her mother's chair and dropped on one knee.

"I'm Rachel Giles now, mother," she said, in a voice which had a deeper sweetness than any I ever heard. "I'm Rachel Giles now, married by his death bed, and I want your blessing."

There was a cruel pause. The hickory stick

rattled on the floor, the clock ticked raspingly and slowly struck the hour, whirring as the weights ran down. My breath came chokingly hard as I, too, waited for the reply. "My blessing, is it?—that's what you won't have. Rachel Eliot you are and Rachel Eliot you shall be to your dying day."

There was no faltering in the voice that denied her only child a blessing—the stern voice of a woman whom the Almighty denied when she pleaded with Him for a son.

I can see the girl now—for girl she always was to me since I began to grow to her age— young with an immortal youth, as she stood tall and straight and beautiful as an angel to my adoring eyes. She laid one firm hand on my shoulder, but her sight was far away. At last, "Will you stay?" she said. "My place is there."

It was a week and more when she came back home and had her widow's mourning made. The old lady set her teeth and said nothing. And the town seethed and seethed and settled down again. But it always said "Rachel Eliot."

The years flew by on the wings of the wind,

as they do in these latter days. The day before Christmas was a week once, and so is the night before the Fourth still to my boys. Some of us stayed on in Whitley, and some married and came back to show our children to Rachel.

And she gathered them in her arms, and blessed them literally. And soon they, too, became little boys and girls, and sat at the parsonage table with old lady Eliot wheeled to her place and saying grace grimly, which was not of the nature of a blessing, and correcting small faulty table manners. I can hear her loud Amen now across all the years, followed by, "Jane, take your feet off the chair"; and later, "Don't leave your spoon in the teacup."

Rachel wore her widow's cap always, and if possible it added to her beauty as she sat in her place at the foot of the table, with her smooth, black gown trig and trim, and her dainty mull collars and cuffs; pouring tea from the polished old teapot, balancing lumps of sugar, pouring thick cream from the high-shouldered jug into the Scotch thistle teacups that had endured the better part of a century without a nick. Afterward she was busy with

the pink-and-white peppermints, and telling frisky little stories to shy young ones afraid at first to laugh.

The old lady took pains, we found, to say Rachel Eliot, which the other always corrected, and at which the old, sharp eyes flashed.

For Rachel the Undesired had followed her high calling of womanhood, and she had not waited till the mother was gone. It would not have been soon enough in any event. Not long since a word from Sally found me, far away from Whitley. She wrote, in substance: "They said I was to tell you old lady Eliot is gone at last. She held on to ninety-eight and rising, and went out like a candle when the wick drops. To her dying day she fretted because Rachel wasn't a man and a minister. But, if I get my guess, they've told her where she's gone, by this time, what Rachel done all her life long and got no credit for here. She couldn't preach—Rachel—but my lawsey! she didn't need to."

## EMILIA

EMILIA was nearly two years older than I and I was her friend. There was a slight tie of relationship between us, so that when my family came to a new home in the town where Emilia lived, I was asked to spend the night in hers. There were older brothers and sisters of whom I stood in awe, as well as parents who were so far removed from my small world that they seemed like Ruskin's "forces of nature," and might have belonged to another and different planet.

But Emilia, nine years and three months old, nearer my own level, was the responsible child of the large family and I was at once delivered into her care. She led me upstairs, I well remember, by one unresisting hand, and looked so grown-up that it seemed entirely reasonable, as if I were following my patron saint.

When she unbraided and brushed my hair for the night, I was not a little embarrassed to confess in answer to her question that I forgot to bring my toothbrush. Her look of distinct



disapproval lasted longer than all the "thou shalt" of parental discipline.

Emilia was of a blue and white fairness without the creamy tints that usually accompany such fineness of texture, delicately pink cheeks, and straight, fine hair, glossy as a purple grackle's wing and very long. I lay sleepily awake and watched her as she brushed it with slow, even strokes, braided it and put on her nightcap, a plain little Quakerish adornment though with no such design.

That was the last I knew until I saw her standing in the first light of morning, dusting her bureau and silently waiting for me to wake.

She was to take me to my family and my new home on her way to school; and after my fretting a little inwardly at the need of waiting for breakfast, we started hand in hand. At sight of the first house I asked eagerly, "Is this it?" skipping ahead for a good look. "No," she said, securing my hand again; "I'll tell you when we come to it." I remember asking the same question as house after house came into sight and her calm, unvarying reply, "No, I'll tell you when we come to it."

The way was long, but I doubled and trebled

it, skipping around her whenever my hand was released from her firm grasp, like an untethered puppy. Indeed, in my glee of pure living I could have barked if something in her face had not made me think better of it. And yet there was no reproof there. The child simply recognized a quality without a name which stood Emilia in good stead not only then but throughout her life. At school she was invariably chosen umpire in all the games. One never had to give it a thought. And Emilia was never an unjust judge. A certain clearness of sight was born in her—a detached sort of background against which all things stood out in high relief.

One day I went with her on an errand to a large house set in a deep orchard. The path wound in and out among shadows that made it a very fairyland to me.

A basket of ruddy and yellow apples stood invitingly on the table in the hall, and without as much thought as Eve, I took one and began to eat it after the errand was done and we went together down the walk. Suddenly Emilia, who had been absently absorbed in the message



she was charged with, said, "That isn't your apple."

I have wondered if the dread Judgment Day could bring greater awakening to any poor soul at the Bar.

Innocence attempted no plea. I had picked it up with as little concern as if it had lain on the grass in the home garden.

"What shall I do?" I asked, with eyes grown suddenly hot, and a miserable distaste for the "Seek-no-further" whose juices turned dry and bitter in my mouth. Emilia went silently on. At the gate she turned and said,

"You ought to tell."

I think my conscience came into being, full-grown on the instant.

"Oh, Emilia!—how can I?"

"I don't know."

"Must I?"

"*I* should."

And I knew very well that she would; but it was different with me. I should have buried the apple and tried to forget even though it rose before me in the dark like an accusing spirit.

Shrinking and quaking, I stopped.

"You come too!"

"No, I can't. I promised to go straight home." And she did. I looked after her resolute back, her decided step, with a great longing for help, a feeling of injustice that burnt like hot iron.

"Don't leave me!" I cried weakly, but she was out of hearing. For a cruel time I lay sobbing without tears on the grass where I had flung myself down, abandoned in the first great strait of my life, and forced to think for myself. It was quite beyond me, and for one blighting moment I hated Emilia and longed to hurt her.

The room looked august as I crept quivering in at the wide open door. No one was in sight. The lump in my throat was as if I had swallowed the apple whole. Presently the daughter of the house appeared, drawing on her gloves and carrying an entrancing blue veil, gauzy as a butterfly's wing, over her arm. I could paint her picture today.

"Oh!" she exclaimed cheerfully and just a bit surprised; "you are the little girl that came with Emilia. Did you forget anything?"

It was then I burst. Between mortifying

sobs and tears that ran down and splashed on my clean apron I said convulsively, "I sto—took an apple."

"Oh, is that it?" She smiled sweetly. "Take all you want. Run along now, and don't cry;—that's a good child."

I think Emilia in the clear depths of her Puritan heart never quite forgave a grown-up young lady who failed to see her advantage and work in a moral lesson.

But to me she was adorable, and my one joy in going to church was to be able to look at her and her beautiful veil all through the service. One can easily see how the worship of saints began.

At school, when the children whispered, "*Teacher won't know*," they quailed before Emilia's eyes and her gentle, "*You will*."

Many preachers of righteousness are not loved. They rouse what we call human nature—a thing that wants to strike back. But Emilia lived up to her creed, and right and wrong never crisscrossed in her honest mind. We called her a seer, a prophetess, in our girlish admiration. She seemed to know in advance just which class would take the

prize, just which trip to town would be useless or disastrous, just who would be too late for the stage, just who would have to wait long before it passed the corner, with an almost uncanny time-sense. Would tomorrow be fair for a picnic in the woods? "Ask Emilia", who had weather-sense as well. And though the day might seem doubtful, if she approved of starting it invariably cleared before we had gone far. This was after we had been transferred at a proper age to a school in town for young ladies. The phrase conferred a sort of distinction eagerly looked forward to by those who had been simply "girls" in the village school.

At Emilia's own home, where I often spent a portion of my vacations, a swift brook called Little River ran beyond the garden and meadow, and the only means of crossing was a slippery, barkless tree-trunk not over steady at the best. "You'll fall in," Emilia said calmly as one day in my rash, young desire for applause I sprang up to run across it before two small frightened children, to whom it was probably forbidden.

And I did.

Emilia drew me out with some difficulty, dripping from shoes to sunbonnet, and wisely omitted the usual platitude—"I told you so!"

It seemed great grace in her even then. The only time I ever saw her in tears was one day in town when she had been out for a book, some blocks away, and two young men on the street turned and stared admiringly at her, with audible comments on her beauty. She had no vanity and simply felt disgraced. Knowing that I should have been secretly pleased at such attention which never befell me, maddened at sight of her tears, I cried out: "It wasn't your fault! It was God that made you so! I'd be glad of it!" But even as I was in the act of consoling her, I quailed before the light of her eyes as if she had accused me of taking His name in vain.

Emilia may not have been great as the world counts greatness. But the light she made for other lives was like that of a fixed star, so far beyond us that we cannot measure it while we try to walk by its steady shining.

## GRANDMOTHER

GRANDMOTHER had completed her ninety-fourth year. Many other things she had finished as well, laid aside, and so passed on hopefully to the next stage. Her eyes were not dimmed, nor her interest in humanity abated. Her always busy hands no longer knitted, crocheted, or sewed. She no longer did kind deeds, except in thought for the sick or needy or those of her own household.

But she remembered, except when the veil that gently shuts out things that distress us of another generation dropped softly over her senses for a time. All disturbing things passed away. Her household was unreal, but never unhappily so. Her son then became her brother; her daughters, the kind ladies who were so good to her. Her little dog became two, and when he lay beside her she asked so persistently for the other that presently he was whisked away and brought in by the door, and she accepted him as the other. She always spoke of "them."

At one time, while she was still able to walk with help, she begged to go home, and was so unhappy to feel herself away, as she thought, that the daughters brought a carriage to the door, and asked her to fill a basket with the things she most wanted to take "home." These were the large family Bible and larger dictionary, which went on the front seat while she was carefully wrapped up and seated at the back, the little dog sitting up very straight and smart by the driver. They drove most peacefully along the village street and slowly, very slowly, up the hill and around the square, coming back to the house by an unusual route—to her entire satisfaction. She was at home; and fancy supplied whatever the surroundings may have lacked. She was satisfied. So may it be in that other home to which she has so peacefully gone.

When she was unable to be taken to the garden in her wheeled chair, or where she could greet friends as they passed her door, she was happy in the sunny room that looked into an enclosed winter garden. Its walls held many treasures that she had collected through the long years—bits of China, old Delft, a broken-



nosed pitcher that she had once caught in haste on her way to the train, years before. For she loved any sort of souvenir of the many places she visited and was unhappy if she failed to secure one.

Once, in the dead of night, she alarmed the family by shouting *Fire!* excitedly. Her room was searched to no effect, but at last on the opposite side of the house, one discovered through a window a house on fire on a hill a mile or more away, where it was impossible for her to see it.

She was particular about her dress, and once said: "When we go to meet our Heavenly Father we must wear our best clothes. It isn't as it used to be, you know."

Tenacious of her own opinions, loving her friends with devotion, generous in all her thoughts, she gently slept life away without a pang, and was beautiful in death with that serenity that we so often see—that unusual beauty that is given to the very old as if in compensation for the losses that time inevitably brings.



## A GRAY DREAM

IT is really only a house. A gray, battered, weatherworn, overgrown, crumbling, very old house. Before it the sea—two fields and a sand-dune away; behind it the forest, with a long, low ledge of rock for foundation. Between it and the fields that are chiefly salt marsh and pasture a crooked road wavering uncertainly past its door, grass-grown and not near enough for impertinence.

The house is mine by right of discovery. Somebody lost it centuries ago, if its face like our human ones, bears any relation to its age. Yet good Nurse Nature long since took it into her warm lap like a fresh babe in the wood, swathed it in russet and green, and set all her birds and winds singing to it till its sleep is profound.

From the west, as one "tacks" with the irresponsible road, its eaves rest on the stone wall that guards its right of eminent domain. But as you draw near, the gray stone chimney rises like a watchtower in solid strength, and lifts

the shingles that lap down like feathers on a dove's breast, from the ridgepole to the old Dutch door, above which runs a molding beautiful to behold.

The ground beneath the lilac bushes is shiny with shattered glass, and the ruined window frames hang by one corner, leaving the entire house-plan bare to every passer-by with quite a shocking lack of reticence.

The battered door with its rusty lock opens into what was once the living-room, with wide fireplace, paneled corner cupboards, and little tuck-away places above the mantel: places for the *Almanack*, the laudanum bottle, the family pill boxes, the rolls of old flannel and linen for emergencies. Bits of these, moth-eaten and frayed, are yellowing away to dust in the corners still.

The spare room at the right of the Dutch door sees the road but dimly through the growth of lilac and syringa at its foot that touches, then mounts far above the eaves. The tiny fireplace has its own beautiful mantel molding, the grooved chair rail is still unbroken, the sturdy floor of oak planking shows no sign of decay.

But the glory of the house is its kitchen, looking with blind eyes toward the garden now reverted to type; hugging to itself a tangle of everything a garden has a right to hold; looking out for itself like a waif and estray, or a street gamin; soaring where it may, creeping where it must, but forever pushing, struggling, fighting for its right to be. Into just such a garden might Gualtier's serpent-woman have gazed from her refuge in the Isle of Cos when she beheld a human being and wept to be disenchanted by a kiss.

Back among the shadows of tree and vine the great old kitchen, still firm to the foot, shows with pride such a fireplace as we only dream of or recall from some state of previous existence, in these sad days of impersonal steam heat; a cavern to which in the first frosty mornings preceding the genuine winter with its snow blockades, a yoke of oxen drew the back log that did duty till the frogs began to peep. A heart of warmth and good cheer, with its oaken settles and its cavern within a cavern—a brick oven, which archaic joy held the whole Thanksgiving feast at once, from mince and cranberry and apple and pumpkin pies to

biscuit fine and white as manna, loaf cake to be frosted later, ring jumbles, seed cookies, turkey and chicken pie. Once in and adjusted to its own place by the long-handled "peel," each appropriated heat according to need, and took the responsibility without demur. It was as if each lent to its neighbor what left-over sweetness of flavor floated about it; an altruism forever lost, or never known to the modern range. For nothing in these comfortable days can hope to know the brick-oven flavor of the olden time.

The buttery—the right hand of the kitchen—is in ruins now; the milkroom shelves fallen and gnawed by mice and time; the spicy odors lost on the winds that blow through and through. And here one comes upon a false note in the corner, a heap of battered cans, now empty of potted meats and vegetables, but with tawdry labels testifying to the fallen estate of the ghostly old shell. They speak raspingly of tenants belonging to a different world from that which wheeled slowly about the scene when the high priestess of the home cooked as Fra Angelico painted.

Rising almost from the garden door, with

thrifty economy of space, climb stairs with slender banisters of beautiful handwork, mostly out of sight, but "the gods will know"; and above, still more stairs clinging desperately to the rough face of the huge stone chimney; a parlous way to the garret of loose floor boards and cobwebby beams. Under the suddenly sloping roof an empty cradle, wooden, long and narrow; overhead a rusty scythe. Symbolism and reality hunting in couples.

A great, sunny room embraces the chimney, and finds somewhere in its unappropriated places a clothespress with wooden pegs. Another, where the west looks in without hindrance, is crowded with sunset light and embalmed memories which do not show. Nothing more.

There are nooks under the eaves where children at candle-lighting time might huddle in the shadows and scare themselves to death with shuddery tales of ghosts and of drowned men who went shrieking down from wrecked ships in some awful storm almost in sight of the sand-dunes.

What a book of life open and bare to any gaze! Its sweet dignity, its fine modesty

violated, its very roof-covering on the swift way to dust; yet still sound in beam and stud and rafter, hewn in the honest old days from oak felled on its own hilltop.

The price one squanders on a summer's outing in a caravansary of the mountains or a Babel by the sea would bring back the gray dream to a sunny reality, richer than anything in new brick and mortar, lovelier than anything in hewn stone. For the men who builded in the fear of God, and so better than they knew, and those who came after them, wrapped the home place in an atmosphere of its own. Its walls are low, its circumference small, but the heart of it is great.

So I glory in it as a possession—a thing all my own. For no one covets it, and my spirit dwells there always, remote and unguessed.



## A NEW ENGLAND LADY

AS I write the words, a quaint, small figure steps noiselessly out of the past, a slight figure, too, though well-knit, weighing scarcely ninety pounds. The face is gently old and withered like a late-hanging peach, keeping still a shade of its youthful pinkiness. The hair, brown and fine, with a wide, white parting and snug twist that curls when released, is kept in unvarying place by an old-fashioned back-comb. Two small, flat curls are held close to the delicate ears, partially covering them, by modern side-combs.

The eyes, gray-blue and clear, look out on a world that has been hard to their owner, who has not repaid it in kind. She must have wondered often at its hardness in the years before she accepted it bravely as something in the general plan.

The gown, clean and becoming, is of fine, old-fashioned calico—always of calico and always clean—chocolate brown in color and lightly sprinkled with tiny sprigs of white. A gingham

apron of blue check is tied with smoothly ironed tape strings around the waist, which is trim as a young girl's. About the neck a kerchief of thick muslin, that might be cousin to the Breton coif, carries with it the thought of spotless purity that always attached to Aunt Lois.

She was aunt to the town—never invited, but always bidden to its festivities, to take the part she loved best, without which tea party, sleigh-ride supper, winter dance, and wedding feast would be incomplete. When she appeared, serene and capable, responsibility dropped at once into her hands, and the satisfied house-mother took no more thought for the day or the morrow.

Aunt Lois was by no means the *grande dame*, the fine lady, of whom we think and speak vaguely. She was too fine, too grand, for careless speech. From her early youth she had been a bearer of almost incredible burdens—burdens borne in silence, with such dignity and sweetness that they became blessings.

“You see, I never had rheumatism or any ailment, not even a headache, so I could always work right along day after day. My back was strong, or I couldn't have done a great



many things that were necessary. Many a time I carried my first baby two or three miles to do house cleaning, and back again at night. He was so good I could put him to sleep and tuck him away in a rocking-chair where nobody could sit on him. So you see he wasn't much hindrance. But I went a little early and stayed later, of course, to make up the time I lost, and right thankful I was to be able to do it."

Aunt Lois had mothered not only eight children, but a good-natured, worthless husband to boot, who sawed the wood for home use and kept the kettle boiling whenever he could be spared from the more hilarious pastimes of the tavern. No work was too hard or too disagreeable for Aunt Lois, no weather too wet or too cold. She was happiest perhaps at those embarrassing times when one family was moving out as another moved into a house, and she as capable high priestess had charge of the lares and penates of both.

"But what are you going to do for your dinner?" one would ask. "There is positively nothing to eat in the house since that last load went, not so much even as a spoonful of tea!"

"Now, child, don't you give it a single

thought," Aunt Lois would reply comfortably. "There's a kettle full of hot water. It's better for most folks than tea, you know. I never was much of a tea-drinker; and I put a cracker in my pocket, too, this morning, for I knew you'd be all stirred up today. It's all I want, certain. 'Tisn't so easy to starve as you think, and I never was hungry like some folks. I rather think the Lord knew when He made me what sort of work he'd laid out for me."

And never was back more beautifully fitted to its burden. On being remonstrated with one day for carrying a heavy basket up three long flights of stairs without stopping to take breath, she said authoritatively, as she kept on: "Don't say a word, don't say one word! Some folks don't have any stairs!"

When Aunt Lois was in full vigor and nearly seventy years old, her youngest child, a lifelong invalid, died suddenly. This daughter was the cheerer and comforter of her life, inheriting the high courage and fearless faith of her mother. The neighbors near and far, in tender appreciation, sent flowers and messages to the bereaved home, and two ventured to go in person, dreading, as all did, to see this personi-

fication of strength and cheer reduced to the pitiful straits of ordinary humanity when its last prop is gone.

The little house stood quite by itself, a mile outside the town, which had gradually drawn near. Poverty marked it for her own—a little one-story, dingily brown house. Its tenant was one of the folks who had no stairs. Three rooms and a roof to cover them were all she owned, but these her labor of years had paid for. She welcomed her guests with the same quiet composure that attended her alike on solemn or joyful occasions, giving them the two chairs near the fire, fetching footstools, begging them to remove and dry their wraps, for the night was damp.

“Her face shone,” said one of them afterward. “We couldn’t speak of the dead, but she did. Tears came when she asked us to take her dear thanks to the people who had been so kind to her. She had not expected such things. She said heaven had always been rather a lonesome spot to her. There seemed to be so little to do there, according to all she had heard and read. But now that Amy was there, as she hoped, ’twas a good deal to look forward to.

Other people had more ideas about it, she supposed. A good many of her babies had gone before when they were little things, but Amy—"not a word of her own sore grief, of her utter loneliness.

In straits of unexpected guests, in house cleanings, weddings, funerals, nothing was ever quite orthodox without Aunt Lois, who lived on alone in her desolate house. Her husband had died years ago, so little missed that the neighbors soon forgot him; her one remaining child had married hundreds of miles away, into poverty more dreary than any she had ever known at home, and her going was to the mother like a child going out of the world. The son-in-law was undesirable in various ways; but Aunt Lois when questioned said serenely: "Susan likes him, and she's the one that's got him to live with; so if she can put up with his ways it isn't for me to complain. It doesn't become me to be talking about their affairs. Most children marry away from their home, and why should I be treated different from other folks?"

Mother-confessor was Aunt Lois to half the village, but never did anointed priest guard more sacredly the secrets of the confessional

than she. No engagement however unsuitable, however queer, could surprise her, for had she not stood sponsor to the fancy in its callow infancy, long before it hardened into fact, and attended the shrinking victim through the long course of chills and fever preceding the consummation? All heartaches and backaches and finger-aches went to Aunt Lois for consolation, and the least of them never went in vain. She knew the hidden virtues of all simples, and her head carried an endless-chain procession of recipes of all sorts, from wine-making to root beer, and from raspberry shrub to catnip tea. Measles and chicken pox, mumps and whooping cough lost their terrors when Aunt Lois appeared, confident and cheery, to charm away crossness and fidgets with stories of when she was a little girl. A plain and homely enough little-girlhood, but one that made the utmost of everything, and saw more possibilities in a sand heap than modern children find in a fully equipped doll house.

The rocking-chair creaked contentedly as she crooned a tired baby to sleep, her own calmness going out to the rasped nerves and setting them in order and harmony. All night

long she could watch with the sick without a wink of sleep, and no one could persuade her to so interfere with the order of nature as to rest by day. Work was her panacea; a dash of cold water outside, a cup of weak hot tea for refreshment, and her day was well begun. She took no sugar in her tea nor butter on her bread because these luxuries were not afforded at home, and she could not be persuaded to pamper herself elsewhere.

At spring cleanings she could take down a sooty stovepipe tidily and set its perverse joints together again with an unruffled spirit. She could make wedding cake or clean a cellar, scrub kitchen floors or do up laces, as if she had been the proverbial angel called from governing a kingdom to sweep a street-crossing.

Gentle, refined in thought and speech, with a low voice, a quiet step, a comforting presence, a heart that held no suggestion of wrong, a nature of utmost charity which believed no fleeting gossip, Aunt Lois saw deep beneath the surface to the honest heart of things, but could never recognize any faults but her own.

Hating sin, she loved the sorry sinner, and could find a ready excuse for any fault or



incompetency outside her own door. From the very slenderest store she gave so graciously that the gift itself seemed great, whatever it might be—a marigold growing by her doorstep, a plump head of fennel or dill, a root of sweet cicely, a handful of checkerberries or wild strawberries in their season, a few radishes from her garden-bed, a stick of candy, perhaps, to a child—the saved-up gift of some lover of her own among the children—or bits of silk to make a little girl's eyes shine, bright fragments treasured from some wedding trousseau of the past.

The world was poorer when she went out of it, to meet her Amy, we trust; to sit resting in the heavenly place with folded hands, perhaps, and spotless kerchief—for we can only think of her humanly—ministered unto at last, but with the bright hope shining in her clear eyes of ministering in turn, after earth's ninety years of tiredness was past.



## THE STORY OF THE TWO BETSYS

IT is no easy matter to tell the story of the Two Betsys and at the same time glorify the dormer-window house. So without going back I will just break in at the point where the driver said he was a stranger in town, but he understood that the two Miss Betsys could tell us everything about folks and places if anybody could.

For a month before we had discovered a house. The Miss Betsys did know all that we wished to; and from their clear, end-kitchen window above the tiger cat sunning on its outer ledge, we had a vision.

Both Cecily and I had gone a trifle mad over dormer windows; and here at the foot of the long, crooked hill, rested comfortably a low-studded, gray-shingled, sloping-eaved, dormer-windowed, abandoned house. "Abandoned to Providence," apparently, for lilacs and currant bushes and hollyhocks stood together and compassed it about in an unhindered way till all its paths were obliterated.

The Sound wrinkled in front, putting out one's eyes where the sun struck it slantwise, giving back myriad splendors for its one. The tides battered on the Dutch door in great storms, they told us. Its lawn was a smooth, curving sweep of sand, strewn with gold and silver shells, with here and there a conch or a baby crab too weak to withstand the pounding, together with great ribbons of shining green seaweed that we tacked up beside our windows till they dried ugly and black, and rattled in the constant wind like baffled sea serpents.

But this is getting ahead of my story, for it was almost a week—six impatient days, to be exact—before we owned or occupied the house.

It was all ours, everything in sight. The sun set in splendor across our bay, with only one lone island, dining-table size, between us and it. Our garden, reverted to type beyond the crooked, mossy apple trees, stretched on and on, up and up, partly over a scrubby hill all huckleberry bushes and brambles, a straggling path of the goat order turning aside often to browse; and lo! at the top the Two Betsys.

The gentle sisters were so precisely alike in age, speech, health, dress and old-fashioned

reserved manners—not hampered as two of a kind are apt to be by grudging Mother Nature—that we named them the “Two Betsys,” in loving remembrance of the two who live immortal in the William Henry letters of everybody’s young days.

There was a *Lame Betsy*, which made our early naming seem inspirational,—like the one who cut William Henry’s hair, with an apron round his neck, while the *Other* looked on; but as our *Other* had formed the same habit from long keeping step, it was useless to guess which was which. Cecily said they had probably puzzled it out for themselves; but we never knew. So startlingly alike were they apparently in their inmost thoughts that she insisted on their going to heaven at last as a single soul, with possibly a crease in the middle, but undivided responsibility for earthly peccadilloes.

They were equally pretty, with the prettiness of old miniatures; fair and delicate, just wilted a little like choice fruit laid by for winter, with soft, graying hair drawn tidily across low foreheads over small ears and carried up with similar twists to a high shell comb.

Their hands and feet were trim and fine, and

not even the early butcher ever saw them in carpet slippers.

Before the summer was over we learned—but not from them—that they had once danced at a commencement ball, where they looked like twin angels. We often wondered if they had kept their gowns and if we might ask to see them; but as this suggested country gossip, we denied ourselves, though with endless regret.

It was to these two-in-one that we went for all our information and help. They lent us Isril, or rather suffered him to come for slight compensation in his noonings, when he worked with the speed of ten and, in hurried fifteen minutes snatched from his allotted sixty, dug holes, set vines and shrubs, cut out ways through our wilderness and even battered into the hard earth a grape arbor, one post a day, unless needed for more vital work, when we were much tossed up and down in our wavering minds as to whether we would have the guest-room bed set up or another post set down to add to the growing look outside.

One of the Two usually stood by to see that Isril didn't shirk. Sometimes both came, ex-

plaining that they had set aside their dinner things to make sure that we were not cheated.

So speechless Isril, meekest, honestest of mankind, had seldom an independent fifteen minutes for his own. As he had no family nor anything belonging in any way to him he slept over the back kitchen near the tiger cat, where he could be dosed easily with handy herbs if so unfortunate as to take cold. Indeed, it seemed somewhat of a grievance to both sisters that Isril was so rugged.

Sometimes they brought to him in a red napkin a doughnut or a wedge of apple pie to eat on his way home if he had abridged his dinner to come to us; but, whatever it might be, he laid it on the nearest stump and wasted no fraction of time. Besides these noon labors, he came daily to bring store of vegetables in their season, with whatever the butcher on his rounds had seen fit to leave with us at the Two Betsys. Whether chop or neck cut, tenderloin, flank or stewing piece, all were of a price; and we soon learned to take gratefully whatever was left for us. It might be that we had a special craving for lamb; and "Mis' Smith (of the boarding-house), she wanted the lamb"; or the fire pre-

pared for a roast, and the hotel-keeper at the village "he had took all the roasts"; so the liver, or heart and lights, or a pig's foot or two, or possibly a slice of ham, were left for us. It was of no use pleading with Isril or sending written messages by him. He was simply Mercury at the bidding of the gods of traffic; and when the gods stoop to do you a favor—what then?

The very first Lord's day in our new home we made the deplorable mistake of asking the Two to our noon dinner, and blushed for days whenever we met them. For they never went out, they told us, except to meeting, and never cooked anything during holy time. They possessed an infinity of leisure which has its root and growth and blossoming only in the genuine country. On week days they rose before the sun blinked over the hill beyond, and the house was in company order when we went for fresh eggs for breakfast, all the butter worked over into golden balls indebted to June only for their color, all the cheeses on the high pantry shelves rubbed and turned. But on the seventh day they rose still earlier (as if the "other six had no souls to save"), that they might lose



none of its privileges. It was quaint and saintly, and argued godly ancestry; but what an intolerable amount of leisure they must have had on hands that we fancied lying passive in similar laps waiting for the going down of the unconcerned sun! I think we were both quite melancholy after the morning service. But this, too, passed.

Our daily breakfast-making was an act of devotion; the incense of coffee rose to the god of the morning. Sometimes when wind and storm strove outside we made a fire of sweet-smelling logs on the hearth like those of Leigh Hunt in his "Earth Upon Heaven," and toasted our bread before it devoutly. From the table we could look out on white sails and fishing dories and the more stately craft leaning and dipping and gallantly bearing down before the wind to unknown lands on the edge of the world that no geography had despoiled—such flights of fancy going with the house whose owner of long ago had brought cargo of spices and fragrant woods from the impossible East.

We thought we sniffed these in the garret, but the Two Betsys had traditional knowledge beyond our instincts, and said Cap'n Ben never



brought such things home but sold them all, hide and hair, in New York, and came up the Sound in water-ballast. Once he had landed on the Sabbath day, and walked into the sanctuary while prayers were being put up for his safe return; which was considered a high-handed proceeding.

We fancied the odor of spices still clinging to garments folded away in the worm-eaten sea chests. But the Two Betsys said Crazy Tim probably broke in there in some of his wanderings, being crossed in love when this complaint was fashionable, and forgot to take his things when he went. But we silently discarded the Crazy Tim theory, for why should he fold away his clothes when he forgot to take them with him? There are many mysteries about old garrets, especially those by the sea.

There was carefree joy, and we were no "shirkers of its nectar," in a fine sense of possession without responsibility. If any choice bit of china were nicked, Indian china from the captain's store,—any great-grandmother damask coffee-stained, it was our own fault, and one never visits transgressions on one's own head. But these things did not occur. On

sunny days when we could tear ourselves away from our vines and the many transplanted things dragged from hollows and hillsides to perish miserably under care, we had picnic luncheons, and once drove with the Two to a grove far from the sea, to give variety to their life and ours—a pastoral picture of a place, with cows and sheep feeding near by.

But the sheep sped away on our approach like the frightened hares from the serpent of the legend suddenly transformed into a woman, and the cows crowded too close for comfort and sniffed at us to know if we were by chance bearers of salt.

So to secure elbow room, Cecily and I climbed a fence, which the Two said they preferred to roll under. Indeed, they had great difficulty in stopping, as the weeds they clutched came up by the roots on this downhill slope, and both of them grass-greened the scalloped freshly ironed muslin aprons they had tied on at starting, for company manners.

The Lame Betsy (as we thought) drove home, holding the lines on a level with her chin, one in each firm hand, while the Other explained that as Job was getting old and apt to stumble

going down hill, we might all prefer to walk and lead him. Cecily held the reins for safety while they clambered out and could not be persuaded that there was no danger. To this day she insists that they clung on behind to retard speed, judging from certain following shadows; but as she has all the pertinacity of youth in her rash statements, I did not dispute it. There are many times, however, when silence does not give consent.

Week by week, argue as we might, we could never persuade the Lamé One or the Other to row out with us in the flat-bottomed boat that went with the house and was another of our happy possessions. They had illogical faith in Man, but none whatever in the skill of woman-kind.

The first time we pushed off in their sight they said they should feel bad if we didn't come back, and ran clucking up and down the bank till we were out of reach.

Oftenest we rowed to the island, an island with pine trees that the red sunsets quivered through, and there built our Spanish chateaux with fountained courts and stately halls, where willing guests responded to wireless invitations,

guests whom we fed on honey dew and milk of Paradise, with no final labor of dish-washing.

But the joys of picnicking and rowing, of swimming in the curving bay with sand-peeps keeping us company along the shining dunes, even castle building on the enchanted island, were minus quantities compared to those of new house owners over growing things.

For here at last was the rapture of creation. He who plants pears, our friends had solemnly warned us, plants for his heirs. Selfish old adage. We had planted pears, and watched each feeble leaflet expanding miraculously under our loving care. The harvest to be was a small matter. One can buy pears anywhere. Who wants a site selected, a house builded and furnished, a wife wooed and won, children adopted for him! We felt that we were cheating our heirs. What is life at its best with no element of expectation?

The Two Betsys often looked in upon us of an evening, before the sun dropped, with Dido, the tiger cat, purring close behind, and we invariably strolled back with them as the dew began to fall, and the whippoorwill made night weirdly solemn—learning scrap by scrap all the

ancient history of our house. Sometimes we coaxed them to stay and sit by our fire, if we had the smallest pretext for one. But this was seldom, and we suspected that it was to them an aiding and abetting of a sinful waste of fuel. Their own keeping room had an air-tight stove, polished to mirror brightness—one of those rural idols that seldom ministered, but was perpetually ministered to.

We rose like the Two before the sun tipped the rim of the world with glory. It might be only pottering around, but it looked like large business to us. There were straight little elms to be chosen and labeled for future planting, cherry trees planted by the wind and careless robins to be trimmed and straightened. Hop vines on the fence escaped from ancient culture were to be schooled in the way they should go by precept and strong brown cord. Many were already in leading strings when Isril confounded all our wisdom by his experience, and we learned that hop vines are “nat’rally left-handed creturs and twist agin the sun.”

There seems on reflection to be altogether too much of ourselves and our house, and altogether too little of the Two Betsys, whose story

this claims to be. Like most long-suffering souls, these patient ones have been temporarily obscured, yet never forgotten. There were days when they gave us the freedom of their shining house, where an unhappy fly was never for a moment at home.

Sometimes they took us reverently to the garret of stored spinning wheels and flax wheels and reels, of long-handled warming pans and foot stoves—tangible records of a dim past—and thoughtfully opened low chests that held treasures of other generations—bed quilts of astounding color and patchwork, from “orange quarters” to “rising suns,” from “log cabins” to bewildering “box” designs, from “Rose of Sharon” to lily semblances that a wild iris would shrink from, and appliqué leaves and flowers.

There were bits of mother’s gown and of Sister Sally’s, and a scrap of pink calico serving as a rosebud, that was the baby’s—the one that died young. Both sighed gently and said she was the prettiest one of all, and there had been eight. We fancied their ghosts looking over our shoulders, peering wistfully into the dim depths to recognize tokens of their earthly vest-



ments with the faint, still clinging odor of mortality.

There was one white counterpane quilted in scallop shells; but not one of them all had seen active service. As hidden store of gold to the miser, to be gloated over at rare intervals, so were these labors of countless years to the Two. Once we were asked with the minister's wife to a quilting, where a minute shell-and-rose pattern was to cover the entire surface of a white spread—a monumental piece of work, requiring the willing labor of weeks. The memory of marking-chalk under the finger nails is cause for shuddering still.

At the close of this unusual session one Betsy passed slices of fragrant loaf cake made from a great-grandmother's recipe, while the other carried a tray with tall, slim glasses of home-made currant wine not to be compared in its innocence with any sinful foreign brew.

There was a delectable kitchen corner, where beside the window, under the shadow of the tiger cat on the ledge, stood a two-story work table; on its lower shelf a market basket of gay flannel bits ready to be cut and braided into rugs. A prettier basket, for show, stood on the top,



filled with rainbow colors for quilts—always quilts! So Satan found no mischief still, excepting always the Sabbath day. Did he smile, I wonder, when the seventh day swung round with its stern command to cease from labor?

One keeps the best till the last, like children with sugar plums. I was confident that the Two had a history, as we say of folk with love affairs, and strained imagination to give it form and color. But not until the last night, when we had coaxed them to come to dinner (we called it tea to preserve our reputation for sanity)—and bring the tiger cat, did it come out. Even then it was delayed until the dishes were washed. Each had brought a blue-check gingham apron to tie on over the white muslin company one, and neither would listen to leaving the obvious duty until morning.

It was a sad disappointment that they would not taste our broiled chicken, and as for coffee—my! they wouldn't sleep a wink. Just a little hot water—mercy no! not tea! that was worse yet; and a thought of milk to take off the edge of the water. That and bread and butter was all they ever had at night. They hoped we would excuse them, and were so sorry

to make us trouble. So we set the chicken aside and fared together like anchorites, while the cat sniffed at the delicious odor of broiling, and the aroma of coffee filled all the house.

But it was the beginning of their story, for coffee suggested Isril, who had formerly been addicted to it. They had been able to substitute cambric tea since he came to live with them, and felt that they had won in a great cause. He was a little peakèd, they said, when he came, because he had had a blow. Her father wouldn't let him marry her, though both their hearts were set on it, because he was, like Melchizedek, without known descent. He had been passed from hand to hand, a foundling, and all his good qualities were of no avail. The girl died soon after; a pretty creature, Lane Betsy said, and the Other added, pretty as a pink. "Brother Man," whispered Cecily as the Two disappeared with a pile of plates while we gathered up cups and glasses—"and I thought he was just two long arms and a back!"

"Sister Woman," I added cautiously, but Cecily shook her head. "Never repeat anything that sounds improbable," she quoted.

It was the warm chimney corner that did the

deed at last. Their own air-tight stove had no atmosphere. And so as we gathered around our cheerful blaze on a chilly summer night the Lamé One, with Dido asleep on her lap, began the story.

Certainly there was a man in it, as I had prophesied, just as there has been from Adam on.

"She thought I was the one, and I thought she was the one."

"And so when he was killed"—

—"time of the war that you don't remember about, we put on black."

—"both of us"—

—"for a spell."

"I s'pose 'twas foolish!"

"But he wa'n't!" broke in the Lamé One briskly, gaining impetus from the pause.

"No," said the Other, "but he was a prisoner ever so long, and a girl down there was good to him, and I reckon he liked her—"

"Didn't have to bother," put in the Lamé Betsy, "for you see there wa'n't but one of her."

"And so they married and went out West," added both in chorus. It was a thing they had

learned by heart in their youth. Then they took it up singly.

"I guess he didn't want folks to know."

"Thought maybe we shouldn't hear."

"And yesterday, up the road he came and walked right up the back steps."

"Caught us blacking the stove."

"And he was an old man."

"Proper good looking though, and pretty spoken, just as he always was—"

"And the kindest heart! Property didn't make a mite of difference."

There was a long, silent moment. The cat stirred in the Lame One's lap, and the clock ticked as it had never ticked before.

"Well?" asked Cecily with shining eyes.

"It wasn't to marry us," explained Lame Betsy, apprehensively. "We're too old—all of us. He said his folks was all gone, all but one nice little girl, his daughter's, and if anything happened to him, would we bring her up? He'd made his will and left all his property to us three."

"I declare!" said the Other softly, looking through and beyond the fire as if she heard it for the first time. But Cecily said afterward

she thought she was wondering to herself if they were all too old.

“He said something to her once,” the Other began in a far-away voice, deeper than her everyday one, “and she didn’t mention it, some-way. And next day he took us both over to the island, and she twisted her foot. You see, she had thin slippers on, and ’twas pretty rough. But she never let on; and next day she was laid up, and told me not to mention it. So that time he walked down to the shore with me, and I took a basket, though he wouldn’t let me carry it, and he dug a few clams for our breakfast,—’twas a pretty evening,—and ’long the way home he said about the same to me.”

It was a long speech for the Other, the longest I had ever heard her make; and when she came to the end the Lame One spoke up with alacrity: “He didn’t know which was which, and I mistrust he don’t now!”

The tiger cat purred lazily, and all her heart went out to its beauty and knowingness as she stroked it lovingly. But the Other still looked through and beyond the fire, and a red spot glowed on the cheek toward me that was away

from it. And that night Cecily's theory of the one soul had a shock.

It was with one long, last look, key in hand, at the summer's close, that Cecily espied a penciled *au revoir* tucked under the door latch, and snatched it off because it looked silly. We were leaving the little sentient place to its own fears and imaginations; its hearth-fire quenched, its blind eyes seeing ghosts of the happy past and knowing no future. It must shudder in wintry storms, wondering dumbly why it should be deserted after its little taste of cheerful life. Some great, cruel storm might again batter at its door and mock its unprotected state. Hence the reassuring legend that Cecily would none of.

It was in the edge of a quiet evening, the welcome lull that follows the Christmas time and sets all hearts at rest again, that we sat before another fire, Cecily and I, living over the summer days, when a box with many wrappings was brought in, a tangle of loosening strings, together with a message from the stage driver that the Miss Betsys sent it with their compliments.

With curious, eager fingers, layer after layer was unfolded, and lo! in a sheet of whitest



boughten tissue paper a generous wedge of fragrant wedding cake!

Cecily thinks it may be the Lame One after all. But I do not think. I know.

Sometimes, as if by pure chance, we come upon an orthodox garden plant, immutable to our thought, that by some strange vagary of Nature has put forth a bud after the first killing frost.

Next summer (D. V.) we go earlier to the dormer-window house. But won't it be queer at the Two Betsys'! Cecily's one-soul theory is utterly wrecked. No more a crease in the middle, but two unequally developed wholes with divided responsibility.

I doubt if the Other will ever halt again. There is a stronger step to keep pace with—another rhythm.

The harsh years will drop away, leaving their fine tracery on the solitary figure only. Hope and happiness are famous strippers of the husk from the nut.

Already in fancy I see from afar (after milking time) two severed from the third, propelled once more by the safe arm of Man, setting out for the isle of Enchantment that red



sunsets eternally quiver over. There we may leave them hand in hand to their fair autumnal dream.

Pray who of us all would barter for the young unrest and flitting hopes of April the durable content of "St. Martin's Little Summer"?

## A DOMINANT MOTHER

IN a cold corner of a New England town, sometime during the last moments of the eighteenth century, a child called David Lammot wailed out his first feeble protest. It was as if the life he had not asked for were thrust upon him against his feeble will; and Goodwife Dean, as she cuddled the tiny body, like that of a callow bird, before the blazing forestick of the great kitchen hearth, sighed audibly that it was a solemn thing for a woman forty years old to have a child to bring up.

Mary Lammot, lying white and still in the little bedroom close by, lighted only by the kitchen fire, heard the sigh, and thought in her heart that it was a more solemn thing, this late coming into life of her one child, than his father's early going out of it had been. For death early or late meant, to the good, wings instead of weary feet; and paradise, a blissful, if vague existence beyond the stars, terribly remote but perfectly secure. It was treasure laid up in heaven, with dauntless faith; while

this small treasure on earth was open to all the evils, pains, temptations and wickedness of that fallen estate called, in irony, man's—an estate quite beyond his jurisdiction that he was burdened and handicapped with but could no more escape than if he were the incapable heir to a great kingdom.

It was Goodwife Dean who, on the eighth day, according to Moses, presented this semblance of a man child to the Lord at the altar of the frozen meeting-house, well swaddled in linen clothing, with a linen cap covering his baldness. When Parson Crane broke the ice in the christening bowl, and the symbolic water, like the oil which ran down Aaron's beard, trickled slowly over the babe's brow and eyelids, another protest, deeper than that which lamented the day of his birth, made a precedent in the sacred place.

Clearly this was not a proper child. Goodwife Dean wrapped the human morsel in a plaid homespun blanket, and hurried through the nipping air across the creaking snow that glistened on the green, to put him into his mother's waiting arms before the comforting fire.

A grand *magnificat* was chanting itself in the heart of Mary Lammot as she received again from the Lord that which she had dedicated anew to Him, together with an unreasoning longing to be left alone with the care of her child.

Dame Dean had a kind heart and warm, motherly hands, but a prying tongue and a very bird-of-the-air way of whispering things abroad; so that this night, as she set the bowl of posset to warm on the hearth, she was tempted to ask, "Didn't his father have a sort of Frenchy name?"—to which Mrs. Lammot responded, hastily, "God forbid!" and closed the subject as promptly as if she had bolted a door behind it.

Dame Dean asked no more questions; but it was known for a certainty that the man waiting for the resurrection, with his head to the east, in the old burying ground below the meeting-house, had once taught French in the great, vague city of New York; and the stigma might hamper young David's career in the way of godliness marked out from birth for every child of Puritan blood.

Fight as she would against the evidence of

her senses, Mary Lammot could not conceal from herself the fact that David was a puny child. Clearly heaven should have dropped this man-germ into mellower soil under sunnier skies if it expected worthy growth. But heaven, as we well know, has its own schemes, and invariably turns a sternly deaf ear to the well-meant advice of mortal underlings.

When the babe slept in his long, wooden cradle before the fire, and the mother ceased to sing mournfully:

Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,

Holy angels guard thy bed,

every quiver of his eyelids meant something, and at night she listened with fear to his breathing, and longed for the day when the struggle for his life should not be so heavily handicapped.

As the months went on, and he wrestled with the croup that beleaguered every wind-swept New England shelter, or grew white and wan under the mysterious pangs of teething, the mother felt that in invoking this precious existence she had done the child a wrong that only her whole life could atone for. Year by year, he went down to death, hand in hand with

measles or mumps, whooping cough or canker rash, the prototype of modern scarlet fever, that long ago subdued the earth; and year by year his triumphant mother led him up from the very gates of the unknown, and gave her little Samuel anew as a thank offering to the Lord.

Other children went to the weather-beaten schoolhouse under the hill, bringing their dinner pails a mile or more to this one seat of learning; climbing the steepes of knowledge through peril, toil and pain, like martyrs of an earlier time, in another cause. But David learned his letters at his mother's knee, and so was sheltered not only from the indignity of the rod that quickened slow brains, but also from the iniquity to be found in numbers.

One summer's night, when the boy had passed his fourth year, the mother woke suddenly and missed him from his little trundle-bed at the foot of her own high-posted and curtained one. A mysterious dream had snatched her from sleep, and still held her in an unreal world. So she lighted a candle at the covered embers on the hearth and searched the house. The two outer doors were barred and every window

closed against the summer air in the good old way. Something in the likeness of terror assailed her calm soul; but she met it with resentment, and went up the long, steep staircase in the hallway, making on the white wall a broken and quivering shadow of her weird self, in short gown and petticoat and high-crowned cap, that seemed to mock her futility.

Not until the spare room, with its high-curtained and valanced feather bed, had been lighted in every corner, and the east room and garret thoroughly explored, did she think of the meal room over the kitchen. As she unlatched its door, a little figure in cap and nightgown crept out with shining eyes from behind the barrels and chests and floury bags, and stood blinking in the candle light.

"My son, what does this mean?" the mother asked severely, and David did not run to her with easy confession, like a nineteenth-century child, but stood still, shivering in the warm air, with the shadow of a great disappointment clouding his face.

"Mother—mother—they said there was spooks in the dark; and it isn't so. I've felt all 'round." Then he broke down and sobbed



quietly. The spell was broken by this harsh awakening.

“Who said so, David?”

David named the boy Abner who did daily chores about the house. The mother relented at sight of the child’s tears. A sense of her own youth came haltingly back, when girlish grief over nothing was possible, and she said gently:

“What if you had found one, David?”

“Oh, I could keep him to play with nights. But he isn’t there.”

“No, David; there never was any such thing. Abner told you a wrong story. There, come to bed now, and don’t cry.”

Abner told no more wrong stories. His comings and goings were zealously watched. But David wearied for his spook. When he shut his eyes at night and was trundled halfway under his mother’s bed, the dark was luminous with spooks. They trooped over the meal chests and hid behind the floury bags and barrels, and wore stars in their hair like fire-flies, to show the way. They sang, but the words were not those of the Bay Psalm Book, nor even of Doddridge’s Authorized Collection.

Up and away,  
Here comes the day,  
Hurry and scurry and up and away,  
Night's for the play,  
Here comes the day.

The air of the song, too, was most secular. A long-legged grasshopper, vaulting over the ryeheads in the upland patch, might have sung just such an one.

A great longing for school took possession of David after the spook episode, and, reasoning for a long time with his small courage, he took it up and went heavily with it to his mother, who was spinning in the meal room. He watched the fluffy rolls of wool, lying like bits of summer cloud at his mother's hand, and wondered why they did not fall apart and vanish altogether as she attached one end to the spindle and drew out the long, whirling thread to the wailing music of the wheel. When she stepped back for another roll, his courage had deserted him; yet he bravely stood his ground and made his plea.

But Mrs. Lammot had carefully planned all the little life before it was eight days old, and took its first flight from her to the baptismal

font. "I will teach you," she said, and stopped the wheel. So every day he stood at her knee, and in his mind saw the pin that guided his wavering sight as an indispensable part of the stately regiment called letters.

He had already seen, as in a lovely vision, the muster of troops for spring training on the green; and there was something martial and inspiring in this small semblance of a sword that rallied the interminable company. A was like Parson Crane, and B like fat Colonel Royce, and C like crooked Gaffer Kemp, leaning his long chin down to his staff, and D—oh, D was like the big bass drum full of the rapture and fury of sound.

From his three-legged stool at the window he had watched the gathering with shining eyes. But this was a day when he did not walk abroad holding his mother's hand. For, after the opening prayer, the reading of religious notices and the singing of a distorted psalm from the Bay Psalm Book, strong drinks were given out over the bar set up at the meeting-house steps, and the beautiful army, with its jingling swords and shouldered muskets and heavenly music, marched only in the morning

with a troop of adoring boys at its heels. David's stool was removed from the window before those of his brave soldiers who were able stumbled home at night.

After the big letters came the little letters—oh, so queer! Little crooked g was Thankful Crane, just beginning to walk alone, with her hood tied under her round chin, and her blue flannel gown almost covering her shoes. He wished they had made just some little things like shoes in front, if they could. And m was like Goody Dean, who always filled up the road so that he could not see past her when he walked out with his mother, and said fatly, "Why, why, little man!"

David stood on his footstool at table beside his mother, and ate with his small knife whatever food she saw best to cut up and lay on his own tin plate, until the day when Daniel Eddy, the carpenter, made him a high chair and painted it blue. This high chair was the talk of the town for many a month, and the cause of much prophesy as to how a child so pampered might turn out. It savored of foreign ways.

It was by means of this same high chair that David, looking down one day on the brown

schoolhouse, saw a deed of shame that made him cover his eyes. It was one of the cruel, disgraceful public punishments, common enough at that dark period of our history; but David never again asked to go to school. It was then that his mind turned toward and clung to the thought of a little dog, a dog that should be his very own. "If I could have a puppy," he asked, tentatively,—“a very little bit of a puppy?”

But the answer, as to most of his questions, was ready made, like those in the primer. “A puppy would track up the floor, David, and bark nights.”

How should this Puritan mother know that when she shut one door to her boy his guardian angel promptly opened another that neither man nor woman could shut? Night after night a curly tail wagged through David's dreams, and beautiful muddy tracks crossed and criss-crossed the white field of inner vision, keeping time to the staccato music of most entrancing barks, the clear “All hail!” of a comrade that made the night more desirable than the day. There, close beside the trundle-bed, were the eager eyes, the one cocked ear, the cold nose

fumbling in his hand, the silky coat, like nothing ever spun on wheel or woven on earthly loom.

Two things made David's fifth winter memorable. Once, when the snow lay deep and crusted on the face of the earth, he cried out from his high chair, where he was painfully learning to knit, "Mother, mother! those boys are sliding down hill!" There were girls, too; but David was not yet in accord with them, so they did not signify. Some bold spirit had devised the wild scheme during the short nooning that took the master away. Led by an older girl, the younger children had dragged out a long bench, turned it upside down, filled it from end to end with human freight, and, steering by its two legs, tried the perilous coast. Up it shot over hillocks of snow, down it plunged into awful hollows, then reared and shook off its riders. The leader shot into the air, a bench leg in each hand, and all the wriggling, shouting heap rolled and bumped with infinite glee and peril to the level below.

David kicked his futile heels against the chair legs and held his struggling heart in with both hands. Such madness was not for him.



Here was bliss past asking for. The ball of yarn rolled under his chair, and the needles dropped their few stitches. But Mrs. Lammot had also looked on, unknown to the boy. Silently she went up to the garret, and brought down a sorry, battered sled made to withstand the shock of generations. It had been the proud possession of her only brother, dead these forty years and more; and as she rubbed off the dust and knotted a bit of bedcord to drag it by she gave the tribute of a sigh to the vanished past. Then she wrapped the child in a warm cloak, brought his new scarlet tippet and mittens that she had made from wool carded, spun, dyed and knitted by her own hands, and reached her own cloak and hood down from the nail behind the bedroom door. David made no sign, but his very heart was liquid within him. Gently his mother led him to the hill back of the meadow that sloped to the brook pasture, and taught the boy to guide the treacherous wooden horse away from danger. It was a day that David remembered with a thrill to the end of his life.

The second epoch was the reopening of the long-closed Episcopal Church across the



green, and the lighting it for Christmas. It was the smallest brown box ever contrived to hold slim worshipers,—like Horace Walpole's temple of Vesta, just a trifle too large to hang on one's watch chain. But when the candles were set at the windows and lighted, row on row, and David watched the tiny flames rise like inscrutable incense to some unknown god, he clapped his hands and cried aloud for joy and wonder. "It is the worship of the Scarlet Woman," said the mother under her breath; but David heard. To him scarlet was the one splendor of the visible universe. If the boy had been born even a half-century later, he would have found out the meaning of the strange phrase. Day after day he climbed the stairs to the freezing garret, and scratched the frost from the small window panes, standing on tip-toe and yearning for one little glimpse of the supernal creature somewhere between porch and altar. As he dragged his heavy sled from hill to hill across his mother's stony acres, he tried in vain to reach some height whence he could look down upon the enshrined mystery. For when the people had gone home the Scarlet Woman was not with them; it was a

moonlit night, and they went early, for David slipped noiselessly from his bed more than once to make sure. Why all the candles—and what did the worshiped Woman do when they went out? Could she find her bed in the dark? for she must have one somewhere; and did she feed on manna, like the Children of Israel in the stories his mother filled his mind with?

At first he had been carried in arms to the meeting-house, and later led by the hand, to sit in the high-backed, square pew, and look up with reverence at Parson Crane in the highest place of all, with a sounding board over his head,—like Aaron, the boy thought, atoning for the sins of the people. Sometimes David sat with his back to the pulpit, warming his feet on a corner of his mother's foot stove, and looked over his bars at the high-collared and short-waisted singers in the gallery. Oftener he watched the big boys, set apart in the side gallery and policed by a stern tithing-man, who now and then hauled some giggling reprobate to the warm noon house standing on the highway close by. At such times the sounds that rose and fell from this retreat, all out of harmony

with Parson Crane's mild voice, made David's very soul quiver.

The boy never went to this noon house, where the heads of families warmed their frozen doughnuts and heated their mugs of flip at a secular fire forbidden in the sacred place. His own home was too near for that coveted privilege. Besides, not infrequently, rude boys lurked in the shadows and peered cautiously in at the window of the house they might not enter. There was evil everywhere except by one's own hearthstone.

Toward spring David was so far advanced in learning that the mystery of figures was slowly revealed to him; and before the ferns pushed their fists through the black mould by the brook, or the daffodils showed yellow through their sheaths, he could recite the multiplication table backward and forward as easily as he could say his letters from A to Z, and from Z back to A again. Then it was that Mary Lamnot once more searched her stronghold, the garret, and brought from its secret treasures a little marvel of a book, with dingy type and wooden covers split with the wet and dry of time, and pictures most wooden of all. In

its very front was the appearance of a ball, with the letters N. E. S. and W. marked at equal intervals on its surface, and standing beside these something that represented human beings in tall hats and knee breeches, to show that people do not fall when the world turns over. David's horizon broadened in a flash, and of his wonder there was no end.

"Are we up now?" he would ask with wide eyes. "And shall we be down tonight?" And his mother would answer truthfully, "I do not know when we are up or when we are down."

"And might we fall off in the night?" the child once asked falteringly, with the fascinating book open and a terrible fear clutching at his heart.

"No, David."

"What would keep us on?"

"God."

"And He would never, never, never let us fall?"

"No, David."

And so the child went night by night to his little trundle-bed, secure in a sublime faith in his God and his mother, those tremendous kindred faiths that uphold the universe.

Mysteriously separated in spirit as far as the north and south poles in the wooden-covered geography, mother and child walked, their lives interwoven mesh and mesh, hers all warp, his all woof.

When a new summer came, the man who worked the farm on shares and yearly dug up the garden patch made in a sunny corner by the south fence a little flower bed for the child, and opened his understanding to the miracle of seeds, and the evil tendencies, since Adam, of pusley and pigweed. After the episode of the Scarlet Woman, David's heart was wholly given over to the splendor of the meadow lilies, the scarlet runners and the flaming garden poppies. So his mother walked with him in the meadow after tea, where he could gather lilies to his heart's content, and gave him her store of poppy seed; and the flower bed filled all his soul for a time.

One day, when his poppies were in bloom, he saw above their heads a sight that sent all the blood to his heart. It was only little Thankful Crane, now secure on her feet, who had escaped from her father's hand and was prancing up and down the dusty highway like a very young

colt let loose, in a scarlet gown and a sunbonnet of the same glorious hue. When she saw David she stopped at the fence and peered through; but David, with masculine instinct, climbed to the top and leaned over.

"You are a Scarlet Woman," he said. "Wait." Back he ran to his garden, and picked every poppy blossom, pulling up in his haste a plant or two by the roots, which he twisted off as he raced back. "Take them all," he said, and pushed them through the fence. Thankful grasped them by heads or stems indifferently, and held up her lips to be kissed. Now David did not know a kiss, but her action signified friendliness, and the two stood smiling at each other with the fence between, and tilting up and down on heels and toes, like two butterflies hovering over a thistle, till Parson Crane came up and drew the little one away without regarding David.

When the child in the blue high chair folded his hands for the long blessing at supper, his heart was so full of the joy of the afternoon that he spoke out while his mother's head was still bowed over her plate and her eyes closed.



"She's a Scarlet Woman." He was only thinking aloud.

"Parson Crane's Thankful?"

The fence scene had not escaped the watchful eyes at the window. David nodded, with his mouth full of bread and milk.

"You mean she had on a red gown."

The vision dropped to ashes in an instant, and left nothing in its place. The name, as well as the quality of scarlet, had taken possession of the boy with its splendor of sight and of sound. But a red gown was just a needful something for everyday covering—like a brown house, or a gray cloak.

As David grew older and stronger he had his share in the labors of field and garden, pulling up stout weeds, piling into pyramids great heaps of red and yellow apples in the autumn, trundling hugh pumpkins to cover in the cellar. But, best of all, he loved the care of the sheep, like the poet-king whose name he bore. Once he was away during a thunder storm that shook heaven and earth and sent a bolt down the huge oak in the pasture, splintering two of its limbs. The boy had only been with his sheep. The little lambs were afraid, he said,



and so he went into the sheepfold with them, and put his arms around the little ones, and they didn't shake so.

"And was my son afraid, too?" the mother asked.

David shook his head confidently. "Why, no, mother. But the little lambs didn't know about God."

Of course, the boys who passed the house on their way to and from school jeered at David, and with insolent gestures called on him to come out and fight. They threw stones at him once or twice, which he returned so valiantly, and with such direct aim, that it seemed impossible for his mother not to know it. Indeed, very few things escaped her eye. The boy had his own happy days, fishing in the brook that ran through the pasture, gathering chestnuts and shagbarks, finding wintergreen berries, digging sassafras roots, bringing armfuls of spearmint and boneset for his mother to dry in the garret, picking flocks of wool from the wild blackberry thorns to save the robins' steps in the nesting season. Many a time he climbed the apple tree whose crooked branches creaked against the bedroom window, and had the joy

of seeing the soft lining his own providence had supplied protecting the blue eggs in the nest. But his visits were well timed, and the mother bird did not suspect them. Once he found an unfledged robin dead under the tree and brought it to his mother.

"It is dead," she said. "Throw it away."

"All the singing in it!" David faltered, with quivering lip.

"Oh, no;—young robins just cry, and open their big mouths for worms. Throw it away and wash your hands."

David obeyed, with a sinking heart, but found a moment when he could gently bury and cover with leaves the defeated plan of happiness.

On Saturday afternoons, before the holy sunset time, the two went hand in hand to the burying ground under the hill, and pulled away the weeds that obscured in rank growth the headstone of the one grave they possessed in common. There were many stones bearing another name that Mary Lammot had wept over in the young days, that David had no share in.

After early supper, all work was set aside

until sunset of the Lord's day. During this time it was not decorous to walk abroad, except to and from the meeting-house.

When David was ten years old he was introduced to Bunyan, and a new planet swam into his ken. He stood at the top of the meadow, and through the golden gates of sunrise saw the Celestial City, no longer vague and distant, beyond the farthest star. For was it not just across the stony pasture, where his own lambs fed, awful in splendor, yet in some way homelike and comforting, and within possible reach? The God of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, had hitherto been to the lad an all-seeing, all-knowing Vastness, unformed and terrible, swinging his world-toy in awful blackness of space for his own amusement and the triumph of keeping folks and animals and houses on his flying ball,—though, in some way past finding out, a beneficent idol, to be worshiped and loved even by the creatures he policed and judged and sentenced.

About this time Parson Crane began to take charge of the boy's education, drawing from his own slender stores of knowledge such portions as he judged profitable for a tender mind. So

David sat with awe at the sermon table, opposite the high priest of the meeting-house, and did his sums and studied his geography lesson, while little Thankful, on the opposite side, shielded also from the perils of the school-house, learned her slow letters without joy or vision, save such as came from companionship in the toils and pains of knowledge.

Once as the parson sat at dusk with his good wife before the kitchen fire, she knitting a long stocking, he warming his mug of flip, his spirit, which was musing over the boy in his charge, spoke suddenly through his lips, as one thinks aloud in the dark.

"The very model of his father—bulging forehead, sloping chin, head in the clouds; all sorts of sense but common sense! What is the widow going to do with that boy?"

"Why can't she make a minister of him?" asked Goodwife Crane, as absently, and with unsuspected and unthought irony.

"He's got yellow curls." The voice came from a dim corner, where little unremembered Thankful was nursing her corn-cob baby, in high-crowned cap, short gown and petticoat.

It was not the custom of the age to allude to

anything in particular before children, much less to speak of individuals, and the parson's color mounted to his high cheek bones as he stirred his flip over and heard it hiss on the clean hearth.

The uneventful years rolled slowly on, and David worked and thought and studied. His soul had gone starving and crying for more light all these years. Then Shakespeare came. If Shakespeare himself had stood before David in the flesh the boy would not have known him. It was the universal heart of things that he yearned for; and their outward expression was brought to him in a cart, by one of those marvelous old-time casualties, a tin-peddler—a yellow, dog-eared copy, with both covers gone and leaves missing here and there. But David knew it by sight from a volume he had never dared to ask about on the sermon table, and hailed it from afar, and still unknown, as a kindred soul. He bought his book at a great price, though it seemed all too cheap to him—an outgrown suit of homespun, a hat and a pair of shoes. There were no poor in the town to accept cast-off clothing; even the minister received yearly two hundred dollars in solid

money. If Mrs. Lammot did not approve, neither did she question the boy, who looked gratefully after the man as he drove away among his jingling wares to the ends of the known world.

Sometimes when she knitted at her candle stand beside the fire, he brought his book—The Book—and read portions aloud, telling the story in his own words. Many things shocked him as he read, and he felt that they would hurt his mother also; but the spell was upon him, and a world like this was not to be had without pain and struggle. The story of Hermione in “Winter’s Tale” he read with many omissions; but the facts would appear—facts which Mary Lammot refused to believe. No man, not even a king, could leave a baby to die, of his own free will, and not know where his wife was for so many years,—and then to have her made into a living statue,—it was all play-acting. To be sure, the minister had read it. But a man named Paine had written a book that had led even righteous men astray, and Parson Crane with all his godliness was but a man. She cautioned David against the book,



but her strongest argument against it was that it was not true.

"Neither is Pilgrim's Progress," was the ready answer; and the Puritan mother listened half-heartedly to the recital of life in an unknown world, the wit and splendor and wastefulness of which seemed a sin.

This was a time when great names and deeds were borne on the air from the dim, seething world beyond this little New England horizon. Now and then the jar of its conflicts struck faintly on David's young ears, and even Parson Crane felt that wicked old Europe was shaken by the hand of God. Napoleon, the invincible, had fallen, risen to blaze again like a baleful comet, and gone out in darkness at Waterloo. Nelson, Pitt and Fox had died in the same year. Our own Capitol at Washington had been burned. George the Third had died and George the Fourth come to the throne.

As David grew toward manhood his mother saw the farm, barren and stony as it was, improve under his new methods of tillage, and felt the strong hand of the lad as she never had felt that of the father. With his hoe he made havoc among the Philistines of garden and field, and



many an hour plowed on the mountains of Gibeah with King David for his ally. Often the mother heard his strong young voice chanting in its own way, as it had chanted the spook song, the sublime words that she kept for the seclusion of night.

There were wrestling matches on the green in these days and David not only went without his mother's consent but threw his man every time,—and she was not displeased. The old stone-throwing, jeering period was past; and the boys who had dared him to fight in his callow days were not forward when invited to try their strength with the tall, well-knit lad, before a crowd. Each Sabbath night, when the supper table was cleared and the fire brightened, David set out his mother's candle stand with her knitting basket, and wound the tall clock behind the buttery door, waiting for the inevitable question, "Going to Parson Crane's tonight?"

"Yes, mother."

"Anywhere else?"

"No, mother."

"Don't be gone long, David."

"I'll be home before nine o'clock."

The year 1820 drew to a close; and almost to its last hours Mrs. Lammot had looked for David's freedom suit, that he might with it celebrate his entrance into man's estate. It had been a long-cherished wish that this suit should be of the finest broadcloth, of a certain shade of blue, made according to exact measurements by a famous clothier in New York. It was as near a romance as anything that ever brightened the winter days to her. But although Colonel Royce had started early with the collected orders of the town, and gone three miles by ox cart and twenty by stage coach, taking sailing packet at the nearest port, it was now almost three weeks since he left. Prayers were offered up in the meeting-house for his safe return, on the Sabbath day before he took his departure, and had been weekly renewed. But winds and waves might be contrary, and more than one anxious heart studied the signs in the heavens. As mother and son sat listening to the soft snowfall outside, a thought that had been growing in David's mind came suddenly to the surface.

"This house isn't large enough for two families, is it?"

The question was unlooked for at the moment, but its answer in general had long been ready.

"No, David. Is there any family you want here with us?" David missed the slight flavor of guile in the reply.

"I was only thinking if I should be married."

"But you will not be, David, as long as I live, you know."

Perhaps the freedom suit, which was delayed for another week, had helped the thought; but David put it resolutely out of mind. How could this mother see that she wielded a two-edged sword to divide a loyal soul's allegiance to his mother from an equal allegiance to his wife.

The years rolled on as comfortably as if people took pleasure in growing old. Goody Dean, who now covered her gray hair with a black false front, still came every autumn to card and spin, to dye and to weave, and from the long webs to make garments for mother and son. Her heavy step jarred on David's thinking, as she paced to and fro in the meal room overhead, and her presence at the table was distasteful to him. The one name that he spoke

reverently and only in his prayers was profaned to him by gossip of the young girl's gowns and tuckers and the fondness of the whole meeting-house for her. It was like Coventry Patmore's "Love blabbed of"; for the woman looked at him covertly when she spoke, and was aware almost as soon as he of the blood that throbbed in the blue veins of his temples. David sang in the choir now, on the men's side, and Thankful's clear second followed his bass in the wonderful fugues that chased the ludicrous sacred words up and down the long road to the end. But when the long service was ended Thankful waited for her father, and David, with his mother on his arm, walked reverently home with silent thoughts.

When David neared his twenty-fifth year, and his mother was still hale and hearty, wearing her age like a silver crown, he fondly told her and, not ashamed of it, sat down to talk over with her a reasonable plan that had been growing in his heart since the night he came to man's estate.

"Mother," he began, "I have been thinking that it would be easy to put a wing on the house with a door on the west, close to the

kitchen. I could be as near you almost as I am in the same house."

David did not go into detail. As in the old days when he read Shakespeare aloud, there were many omissions. But in his own mind there grew a sunny addition to the house, with a porch to the east, and dewy morning glories in blossom there when he went out to his early work. The birds would sing around it, and scarlet poppies grow close to the doorstep, and scarlet runners climb over the door; and in their season he would bring home heaps of meadow lilies. And perhaps at evening, as he came home down the lane, he would see from afar a sunbonnet that he knew so well; and there might be wild strawberries, or partridge blossoms, or purple grapes and blackberries, according to the time of year, to pick on the way home.

"If the house isn't large enough, you might build on—after I am gone."

David's heart sank, and his lovely dream faded; timber, joist and beam, porch to the east, morning glories and scarlet poppies all went down to dust, and were more thoroughly swallowed up by mother earth than the proud

Korah's troop of his outgrown catechism. A tear shone for an instant on his lashes, but the mother did not see it; a few things escaped her now. It was like that last silent tribute over a grave that leaves no bitterness, only infinite regret and longing.

And then, quite slowly, but surely, Mary Lammot began to fail. Even David did not realize that he always lifted her chair now, hung the kettle on the crane, brought her everything she needed, and kept all possible care from her. A slowly creeping but painless rheumatism made her conscious of the growing years. She could no longer go to the meeting-house without the support of David's strong arm; and it was weeks since she had gone down the hill to the burying ground. Once she opened her Bible, seeking for a sign, instead of trusting her own heart, and her finger rested on the passage: *For your ways are not my ways, neither are your thoughts my thoughts, saith the Lord.* Half afraid lest this should be forbidden ground, she set her lips and tried again, this time in the New Testament: *For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife.*



The words gave her a kind of unreasoning terror. Were there unseen powers in league against her? Had she been fighting against God while doing what seemed best to her? Clearly it was not Bible doctrine that a man should wait for the death of father or mother before making his own home. For a whole year she turned the matter over in her careful mind. She was more alone than usual these years; for during the winter David taught in the brown schoolhouse under the hill, giving his summers to the care of the farm. In these still days Mary Lammot reasoned with herself. She did not need a daughter; David was all in all to her; and yet—perhaps she did not fill his whole heart as he filled hers. For thirty years she had had her boy; she had known every act of his life, every thought of his heart. Had she? Well, what she had not known she had guessed at. But there were years precious to her that no wife could have part or lot in; the soft, baby hands on her breast, the sweet breath on her cheek, the sorrows and pains that she alone could comfort and help,—all these belonged to her, laid up forever where moth and



rust could not corrupt, nor the most exacting wife break through and steal.

When David turned the key of the school-house for the first time, there was no doubt in his mind as to the outcome of the experiment. It was the open door of his life, and not only of his, but of all those who called him master. It was his simple belief that learning was a pleasant thing, to be come at naturally; and while the fathers, many of them of his own generation, prophesied that a boy unbirched would grow up a dullard, David set his face steadily toward his ideals, and took counsel only with himself. In his system there were neither rewards nor penalties. He held that the joy of accomplishment was the highest gift of the gods; a thing too sacred to be tampered with. He could not foresee how many generations of men and women would use his name as a thing to conjure by. For he changed the course of events as effectually as he erased the old, hard methods of doing sums from the cracked slates that had been handed down from father to son.

The thirtieth winter of David's life was one of unusual snow and cold even for bleak New

England. Houses were snowed in as high as the north garret windows; and many families lived like the Esquimaux, sheltered and warmed by their sternest enemy. David's hands were full, making his animal and his human flocks comfortable.

During these weeks of David's absence, and the long Sabbath days when even the diversion of the meeting-house with its frozen atmosphere was forbidden Mrs. Lammot, her slow thoughts circled round and round one single theme, growing each time nearer the center. As she was able, she looked over the treasures of her wedding chest, and slowly matured her plans. She forgot that she was lonely. The passing bell scarcely gave her mournful thoughts or suggested her own mortality as it rang out on the clear air, for there was strength of purpose and sound mind in her still. When sixty-nine strokes for Colonel Royce tolled heavily, she reflected that his life had been well spent, and that he was now better off, doubtless rejoicing with his wife dead these many years, and leaving no child to mourn his loss. And when a little later Goody Dean folded her busy hands, every one of the eighty

strokes told of good work faithfully done. It was like writing one's record on the vibrant air for all to read.

The evening of David's thirtieth birthday fell crisp, clear and moonlit. David drew the round table to his mother's elbow chair, and by the light of the fire spread the cloth, brought from the corner cupboard the old Delft plates and cups and shining pewter sugar bowl and ewer with milk, butter and rye bread from the cold buttery that was fragrant with mingled odors of pumpkin pie, ginger and cinnamon; a very meeting of north and south poles it had seemed to the boy's youth. He raked out the embers, brewed the tea on the hearth, and fried thin slices of ham in the long-handled frying-pan that his mother could no longer lift. When they had supped together, he cleared the table quietly, brought a basin of hot water softened with milk, and read aloud, while she washed her heirlooms for him to set away. He began winding the tall clock, slowly winding up the six feet of cord that held the heavy weights, and listening for the old-time formula, which was to fail for the first time since his boyhood.

"Bring the candle stand, David, with my

Bible and the knitting work, and set on it the brass candlestick and snuffers."

David took from the mantel one of the tall candlesticks and lighted the candle at his mother's right hand. Then he saw for the first time that she was dressed with unusual care. She wore a high tortoise-shell comb that he had been allowed to hold in his boyish hands, and a fine tucker, white and sheer.

"It is your thirtieth birthday, my son."

"Yes, mother."

"I want you to put on your freedom suit. Go into the parlor and open the highboy drawers. You will find everything you need—what your father wore when we were married; you are his size. The linen I bleached this fall. The lace ruffles are yellow, but I could not touch those. They are just as they were thirty-two years ago. In the bottom drawer you will find the silk stockings and knee-buckles and low shoes. When you are dressed, come down and let me see you."

"The long stockings will not show, mother."

"I shall know. Then go to Parson Crane's and bring Thankful home."

"To stay, mother?"

"To stay. I have set the house in order. She will not find anything amiss."

David's heart was too full for speech as he went up the steep staircase to the spare room, for many years his own. He knelt beside the bed in silence, and the words that came to his trembling lips were those that God alone heard.

The eyes were dim that, an hour later, looked at all this bravery of attire in the gilt-framed glass on his chest of drawers; but his mother's eyes greeted him, wide and clear, as he stood before her. Lover, husband and son!—the years were rolled together as a scroll. He knelt before her as in the old days when he said his *Our Father*, and she laid two wrinkled hands on his still sunny head. As he rose, words failed her, and he waited. The clock in the corner ticked on solemnly.

"Will Thankful like to live with an old woman, David?"

"Yes, mother."

"You have asked her?"

"There was no need, mother. I have known her all these years."

Mary Lammot's clear eyes were troubled.

"But you have asked her to be your wife?"

"No, mother."

"David—David—and all men wanting her!"

"How could I, mother, when it was the price of your life?"

A red flush rose slowly to the mother's eyes, and, as if she had for an instant changed places with her son, the slow, reproachful years trooped past. It was the one vision of her life. David raised the two thin hands to his lips,—the first caress he had ever given her.

"But will she come, David?"

"She will."

"How do you know?"

"We have cared for each other always, mother."

"You will come home early, David?"

"Yes, mother, before nine o'clock."

David went out in silence at the door so near the wing of his young dreams, and Mary Lammot turned painfully in her chair for a last look at her own boy.

"She shall not live with an old woman. He shall build his wing. I will have the trees cut tomorrow, and Abner shall square the timbers."

But what the mother saw was only a bare addition, without porch to the east, or dewy

morning glories, or scarlet poppies looking in at the door. There was no vision; but the plain fact brought content. She laid aside the knitting work, folded her hands on the open Bible, and waited.



## MISS 'DASSAH'S PHILOSOPHY

NOW, Miss Lucy, honey, whatever fetched you to the laundry, eh? Here's your mummy's pretty little ruffles all a-trying to get dry and Mandy pesterin' me to tell her a story! Mandy, fetch Miss Lucy the rockin' chair. No, no! not there,—it's drafty, can't you see? and she jest fa'rly out o' the measles.

"Fetch a little piller for her back, child, and jest shet the kitchen door. If I'm goin' to have company, all the etceterrys has got to be 'tended to.

"And you want the chicken story sure, lovey? Whoever told you 'bout that? Mandy, I'll be bound,—she's that talky-talky! My land! I shouldn't wonder if the minister'd be knowin' of it next.

"Now's my lady all fixed? Real comfy? And the chicken story 'tis!

"Well, you see your pa, he knew las' time how Grigson was all done up with ague and roomatics, and he told Obed to take Jibsy's head off and give her to me for broth. Jibsy's that yaller hen, you know, that can't stay in

the chicken yard to save her neck. She's a roamer, Jibsy is—leastways she was; she'd fall out o' the country, I do believe, and make as though 'twas all right. And she set a bad example to the rest, so they's always tryin' to get out, not knowin' when they's well off,—jest like folks.

“Old Jibsy's head always was ketched between the pickets, and somebody had to run and back it in again. You see she didn't know anything—even for a hen, and that's as small as I can say, honey. But, then, maybe you didn't want her head took off, and Mandy hadn't ought to let on. You don't care? I'm glad, honey, you didn't have your little heart a' achin' 'bout that yaller hen. She's better off. And she'd a pecked you any day if you tried to back her in, jest like some folks,—even if you did love her.

“What did I do with her? Well, she hung up on a nail in the stable head down'ard—only she didn't have any—till I got my work done and went home. 'Twas eight o'clock, dark, dreary, and Jefferson lane's no fool of a walk from here. Jibsy was jest such a bunch of feathers,—you never did see. ‘Why,’ says I,

'old lady, you'll weigh ten pounds 'fore ever we get home. Feathers enough for a little piller too.' So I put my apron over her, for boys will be 'round hootin' after dark, and I walked and walked, thinkin' and thinkin', and like as not talkin' to myself 'bout how Grigson would admire that broth. And pretty soon, 'most fore I was 'ware of it, I was that happy with my plans, there I was home, and the shade shoved up, and the curtain wide open and Grigson sittin' all scrooged up over the fire. I knew his aches was bad, for there was a storm comin'. But there he was all alone, singin', singin' away to pass the time; so I stood still and peeked into the window. Well, he rubbed his lame side a spell and then he reached out, real stiff, and poked the fire so's 'twould be bright when I got there, and all the time he was singin' away to himself—for Grigson's got a real good voice:

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home.  
If you get there before I do,  
Comin' for to carry me home.  
Look out for me, I'm comin' too,  
Comin' for to carry me home.

So when he come to 'Look out for me,' I jest unlatched the door sof'ly and then I flung Jibsy in—clear acrost the floor—flop!

"'Oh my, oh my!' says Grigson; 'what's that? What's that?'" says he, all of a tremble, 'what's that?'

"Well, honey, I dropped right down on to the floor and laughed like I'd die. 'Oh, Lord, pick me up!' says I, 'or I never'll get up again in this world.'

"And Grigson, says he, 'Well, Miss Dassy, I can't pick you up for sure, and the Lord, I don't b'lieve he will,—so you jest best scrammle 'round.' And then we laughed and laughed till you'd thought we was two silly young ones. 'What's that!—what's that!' says he, and off we went again. 'I thought mebbe 'twas a cherub,' says he, 'all along of the singin'.' When we could stop laughin' long enough I got the kettle over and het water, and doused Jibsy up and down, up and down, in the pail,—steamin' hot 'twas and smelt real good and chickeny, and whisked her feathers off, pinfeathers and all; and when Grigson went to bed I had a bowl of the loveliest chicken broth for him you ever set tongues on. And between the

laughin' and that chicken broth, if he didn't get up in the mornin' real limber!

"'What's that?' says he first thing; 'what's that?' It fairly makes me ache to think of it now.

"What makes him call me 'Miss 'Dassah'? Well now, what a child! Such head pieces white folks has! They chris'ened me Hadassah, deary, down in Maryland at the major's, where I was raised, when the major's lady that was, was jest comin' of age. You see my mummy was old missus's nurse; and they kept us both in the big house, and we lived with white folks and learnt white folks's ways. I never did 'sociate much with colored folks—and I couldn't stand their ways. They said I was proud; and I ain't denyin' it.—You see, honey, if you live with white folks you get to talk like white folks and to feel like white folks and to act like white folks.

"Well, bymeby when little Miss Milly got big enough to go to school I had to go 'long with her and see to her, and the old major he would have me be her nurse. Old missus had another baby then and mammy had to take care of him: so that's how I come to belong to

Miss Milly. And I forgot to tell you my mammy's name was Esther—jest as I forgot to tell you Miss Milly was old missus's baby—and so they got mine near to it as they could. Don't sound a mite that way, does it, now?—but they said 'twas the same in the Bible. And they couldn't be callin' two Esthers everywhere—you know that, don't you, honey?

“Well, Grigson he was the major's man, pretty near old enough to be father to me; but the fam'ly had all kind of set their hearts on it, and what they set their hearts on gen'rally had to go. He was in the house too, very curtseous and 'spectful and that's how he come to call me Miss 'Dassah.

“Bymeby he wanted to come up North after the war, a-barberin', though he did jest hate to leave the major. And one day says he to me, ‘Miss 'Dassah, if the missus'd spare you we'd go up to the big nor'ard together.’

“‘Go long!’ says I; ‘Grigson,—what put the idea in your head?’

“I'd suspicioned it, honey, for a good while, but I wouldn't let on. Old missus was gone and Miss Milly was all the missus we had got left. Well, he went and spoke to Miss Milly all un-



beknownst to me, and she up and spoke to the major, and betwixt and between them they got it all fixed up,—day set and all. Miss Milly said if I was agreeable we'd stand up and be married in her own back-parlor the day he started; and then he could come up here a-barberin', and when he could say honest he'd got a home for me I should go too, but not a minute sooner. She was a good missus, lovey, I tell you, and she knew what was for the best, if anybody did.

“So Grigson went off, and powerful lonesome the old place was. He was always singin' nights on the back porch, and after he was gone the whip-poor-wills most drove me crazy. 'Twas so still they used to come up and say it right at me; you know, deary, it's the loneliest sound. The little hoot owl's creepier, but he ain't anything like so lonesome. And I staid there ten long years before he sent for me, deary. And then Miss Milly took sick, and I couldn't leave her, you know; and it was two years and a half she was jest like a baby and I with all the care of her.

“The old major he died all of a sudden two weeks before she did. It seemed to kind of



hurry her off. She wasn't contented to stay a minute after that. And she told me all the things I must do,—jest how to get here and all that. She'd left me a little money, she said, but not much, for they'd used up things as they went along,—real generous, both of 'em, and they's a lot of poor relations lookin' out for the leavin's. But the day she died she made me fetch all her things and she picked out all the cotton sheets and piller cases and body linen that was her ma's, and two table cloths and a pile of towels, and had me pack 'em in a big trunk before her eyes. And says she, 'That all's for you, 'Dassah.'

"'Not trunk and all?' says I.

"'Yes,' says she, kind of low and faint like, 'trunk and all.'

"My, how I did break down and cry like I'd lost my best friend, as I had—'most.

"Well, I got here someways, but I tell you, honey, 'twas the biggest job ever I undertook. Tell you 'bout it? Well, sometime, p'raps. Ask your mummy to let Obed drive over to my house some real sunshiny day and you'll see where I come to.

"Obed knows my house. There ain't a bad

thing goin' there all along the row,—measles nor mumps, nor yet chickenpock. Jest old folks living in our lane. Many's the time Obed's fetched me a big basket after Thanksgivin' and Christmas time or when your mummy's had a party. But you'll nigh die a-laughin', Miss Lucy, when you come. There's a little sort of path runnin' all sorts of ways, for all the world like a pig bound for the woods, or Jibsy when she had a roamin' fit on. And there's a heap o' little colored houses, set cat-a-cornered and all sorts o' ways, so's they've got a foot to stand on. And there's a little chapel with a bell, where there's a real Sunday-school. I tell you we're religious folks over there.

“Well, Grigson he partly bought the house and he partly built it. The other man cut off a good bit of it and moved it away, and Grigson tinkered up the end of it, odd times when he'd get a few boards. And the stairs,—oh my! how I laughed and cried when I come to see the stairs he'd made. You jest had to go up 'em sideways with a rope to hold on by and bump your head at the top if he didn't sing out to be car'ful. But 'twas ever so much better'n a ladder, because it's real boards, though they's

no backsides to them. 'But,' says Grigson to me, 'what if they wasn't any at all!' And there's two rooms down below and a real cellar. I've got my mummy's painted picture in a frame in the front room, with a lace collar on and a finger ring that Miss Milly gave her. It takes up 'most of one side of the room and would 'stonish you, honey.

"The folks come in from Sunday-school to look at it,—minister, too. A real painter did it, a man that worked at such jobs for white folks. Ah, didn't I tell you, lovey, I wasn't like the colored folks?

"She's lots of company for us, deary, there's so much she don't say. And her eyes go roamin' all over the room so I darsent have a speck o' dust in sight. Miss Milly put her own lace collar on her that was old missus's when the painter man came, and she had a great Bible in her lap that was a weddin' present from the major.

"I reckon we wouldn't had it made so big if we'd known what a little house would fit it,—and a kind of a tight fit it was,—you'll see when Obed fetches you. But then, as Miss

Milly use' to say, you can't have too much of a good thing.

"Well, and so we've got along. He's a pretty old man now and sort o' stiff like with room-atics, and I'm none too young myself, if only I could ever remember it! I can't never seem to forget when I was a girl. Along summer times we work in the little garden patch back of the house, when I don't have laundry work. You see he had to give up barberin', gettin' clumsy like with his hands, and 'twas a great blow; kind o' knocked our underpinnin' right out. But he digs when he can, and gets a little job in big gardens once in a while, though he can't do much—Grigson can't. But we can 'most always sell our garden stuff, lettuces and radishes and such like, and buy a bit of meat now and then. Oh, we jog along.

"You feel sorry? Now don't do that, honey! Lots o' folks hasn't any house to live in, say nothin' o' friends and a garden patch. Now let me tell you somethin' to make you laugh. Your mummy won't like it if you go back lookin' solemn.

"One night, time o' the big blizzard that we hadn't had any 'xperience of—no, nor nobody

else, for there never was such a scary time,—the wind up and whipped a brick off'n the chimney flop down onto the roof right overhead. I thought the end o' the world was comin' sure.

“‘My, oh my, what's that?’ says Grigson. ‘What's that? Another chicken, Miss Dassy, sure's you're born; but it's a tough one this trip I bet! Didn't hit way ole Jibsy did—jest a bunch o' feathers.’

“And, lovey, he laughed and squealed long o' the wind, sort o' silly like, till I had to get up and make him a good stiff cup o' boneset tea to straighten out his nerves. Men will be silly sometimes, honey, jest like women folks. I had to make up the fire, for 'twas gone out by that time, and cold—oh my! And it took so long that when I got it ready he pretended 'twas Jibsy's chicken broth.

“‘Do tell,’ says he, ‘how you got it so quick?—Oh, you're a smart one!’ says he, ‘jest like you was down to the ole major's.’

“And, Miss Lucy, I reckon he won't get over that yaller hen and the way I flung her in at him till his dyin' day, if he does then.

“You see, deary, he was that low in his mind

with all his aches and stitches, and waitin' so long for me to come and get his supper, and 'twas a good thing to stir him up; kep' him from thinkin' how hungry he was,—first off the kind o' shock and then fillin' up his mind like, with that chicken broth to come.

“What's that you say?—did we ever truly go hungry, lovey? Well there! What for you speirin' round to know! Might make you feel bad, and your mummy wouldn't like that.—We're use' to it, you see, and lawsy! we don't mind way white folks does. The good Lord he gen'rally sees to it that we get somethin'. To be sure in the big blizzard we both took sick and nobody could happen along such a time you know, 'cept 'twas an angel,—and 'twa'n't a time for flyin' neither. So we did run pretty short. Fire out and some little odds and ends of bread and a cold potato or two in the cupboard, and a little raw codfish.

“But Grigson he crawled up and got the things all together and a big pitcher o' water and the teapot with a little cold tea in the bottom powerful strong, and we jest had a picnic there in bed and told stories three days 'running.



“Yes, and we sung all the good old tunes Miss Milly learnt me, and some others he knew: ‘Mary and Martha’, and ‘Gospel Train’, and ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.’ And he made up one out of his own head, all about New Jerusalem and golden streets and milk and honey runnin’ everywhere. And he was that ferce for it all, and that milk-and-honey-for-to-come tasted so good to him, I jest broke down a-laughin’. ‘Goodness, but wouldn’t the roads be sticky!’ says I.

“‘My, but won’t you be a wild one up in heaven!’ says he. ‘Oh my! my! but won’t you be a wild one up in heaven, Miss Dassy!’ says he. ‘The Angel Gabri’l can’t pitch the tune when you’re ’round.’ Many’s the time I wake up in the night and think o’ that.—‘Can’t pitch the tune,’ says he, ‘when you’re ’round.’

“I tell you, lovey, we have happy times. Why, the blessed Lord himself was cold and hungry, I’ve heard tell. One time a white minister preached to us, and says he, ‘Did you ever think how our dear Lord walked and walked the way we do, and took the sun and the wind in his face and the rain on his side so to keep it off ’n us, as ’twere? And He



hadn't where to lay his head. Now think o' that!

"Miss Lucy, honey, let me tell you and don't you ever forget there's always somethin' to be happy for in this world if we don't try to shove it out o' sight, grumblin' about what we haven't got. We're all a-steppin' along to glory, and it's no way wrong, says I, to have your laugh and joke and your good time and pass it all along the road to downcast ones that can't see the sun shine. And hows'ever pinched we've been, me and Grigson, I tell you true, honey, 'twas a sing'lar unlucky day when we couldn't find something to laugh about, and be thankful to the good Lord for. If you've got religion, even if you haven't got learnin', it's like havin' wings to know how to laugh. And I reckon, Miss Lucy, when Gabriel does blow his trumpet we'll be steppin' along right after the white folks, spry as anybody exceptin' it's the minister."

## THE WOOING OF DANGERFIELD CLAY

ONE Saturday afternoon three men sat in the open store door of a little hamlet. It was a warm delusive day in early springtime. Robins were building cheerfully in the orchard apple-trees that were budding prematurely.

Eben Hull, owner of the store, leaned across the long counter in intervals of coffee-grinding when the conversation fell to a dead level or ceased altogether. The deacon had stopped to discuss town politics; the teacher had hours of spare time; the doctor was on his slow way home from the single patient whom he cheered and amused semi-weekly at the rate of two shillings a visit.

As conversation languished at the store door and the coffee-grinding began again, a white horse with long neck, thin mane, hollow back and jerking legs, came over the brow of the hill, followed leisurely by a dingy top-buggy that creaked its uncertain way across the bridge and past the sawmill.

"Dangerfield Clay," explained the deacon, sitting upright in the wooden-bottomed chair he had just tilted comfortably back against the door-jamb.

"Dangerfield Clay?" the doctor asked thoughtfully, glancing over his shoulder, and the teacher added, "Dangerfield Clay; and upon my word, he's going to hitch his horse."

"A wise precaution," said the doctor with a twinkle, and the teacher nodded silently.

"He's got something on his mind," said the doctor, who had notable powers of observation.

"Won't keep it there long," commented Eben Hull, rolling down his sleeves. "Jest like a si've."

"Fixin' up, be ye?" complained the deacon. "I reckoned *we* was comp'ny."

"He might be shocked," said the teacher, straightening his tie and glancing critically at his shoes. "Ever see him when he wasn't in apple-pie order?"

"Come in, Mr. Clay," called the doctor cheerfully, playing the host, when the white horse was unchecked and encouraged to nip the short grass by the roadside. "Glad to have a quorum."

The newcomer lifted a broad-brimmed hat and bowed courteously as he approached the group. No one stirred, though Dr. Swift who had taken the initiative, held out two fingers which were cordially shaken.

"You all looked so inviting," he apologized in a soft, slow baritone. "I'd no other call to stop—or—none to speak of. Coffee? No, thank you, suh. But the air is quite redolent of its perfume. Quite so. A tempting odor, gentlemen. You are very kind; thank you, I will take a chair for a moment."

"Must be kind o' lonesome up amongst them pine-trees," suggested the deacon.

"'Tis so, suh; too lonesome for a man's health. I've been thinking, gentlemen," he added, "of begging your kind offices in a matter I have much at heart."

A murmur of assent, or possibly only of interest, passed like a slow wave around the little group—like a ripple of the tide against boulders.

"You may not know, gentlemen," he continued hesitatingly, "but I am a kind of forsaken man. My ties are all broken. I may say I am adrift."

"Mm," murmured the deacon, and the teacher sighed, while Eben Hull looked alert.

"I have wandered east and west," the soft voice went on, "east and west, wearifully, without pleasure or profit."

He paused, but no one broke the disconcerting silence. A round-eyed robin with two straws in his beak alighted for an instant before the door, with a wondering look at the idle group. Dangerfield Clay picked up the dropped thread of his narrative: "For a half year I have lived among you without finding—"

"What you lack," supplemented the deacon. "Mm."

"You will pardon me, gentlemen," the low voice continued; "but I rose this morning with my mind fully made up. I left my sunny plantation," he went on reminiscently, "and my first Mrs. Clay at the outbreak of hostilities. I am not a fighting man, gentlemen. I crossed the border. My second Mrs. Clay I parted with, later, beyond the Missouri—far beyond."

The teacher joined the lounge behind the counter, and the deacon moved restlessly in his chair. "Where be they now?" he asked se-

verely, with raised eyebrows. "Did they stand by each other?"

"No, suh—that is to say, one sleeps beneath a yew tree on the old plantation; the other on the wide prairie."

"Mm," murmured the deacon, suddenly sitting bolt upright; "I see, I see."

There was a dramatic pause of two or three embarrassing seconds. The deacon broke the silence. "I calc'late you're on the lookout for a third," he said emphatically.

"To put it somewhat—baldly—as one may say, I could wish for a suitable companion in my solitude. I should have no objection, under the circumstances, to a widow."

"With a little prop'ty," suggested the deacon.

"I was about to mention that, suh; under the circumstances it would not be an obstacle."

"Mrs. Mixer is meditating a separation," the doctor began with a twinkle, but checked himself and listened as the other coming back from the past continued:

"My hearthstone, as you gentlemen know, overlooks a vast, a lonely pine forest; the wailing of the wind at night suggests—well, there

are few things that it does not suggest. I often shiver through the sleepless small hours, and the coming of daylight is a welcome thing. I talk to myself, sometimes, but it isn't inspiring."

"No, indeed," breathed the teacher, in a tone of fervent if misplaced sympathy.

"I know what you want," said the man leaning over the counter, with the briskness of a fresh idea. "A re'el good cook. That's what you want."

"More than that, suh; I need a congenial spirit."

"Melissa Green," suggested the doctor in parenthesis to the teacher, whose narrow face broadened into a hilarious smile.

"Did I understand you to—"

"Well," said the doctor, in half-repentant mood, "there is a woman living a mile or so out of town—not a widow, and really I don't think she would suit you—no, I really do not."

"Go on, go on," called Eben Hull gleefully. "He ain't real farse for a widow, far's I'm a judge. Go on, doctor."

Doctor Swift shifted uneasily in his chair, for he was kind at heart in an unthinking way.



"Mr. Clay," he said candidly, "this was a little joke of mine that we won't carry further."

"Dr. Swift," responded the other, "you are familiar with the adage about *many a word spoken in jest*."

"Yes, yes, but we'll drop it, we'll drop it," insisted the doctor, "Melissa's too old for you, and—"

"My dear suh," interrupted Dangerfield Clay, "Mahomet's wife was seventeen years his senior; I humbly hope that I also am a chivalrous man."

The silence grew embarrassing.

"The best farm in the country," began the deacon.

"And the best policed," added the teacher.

"Ah-h, a capable woman?"

"Ex-actly," smiled Eben Hull.

"She can keep two hired men a-buzzin' year in and year out," added the deacon.

"Which way does Miss—Melissa live?" asked Dangerfield Clay. "I should like to drive that way and take a look at the farm;—make some inquiries about it."

"Like's if you thought o' buying it—mm," commented the deacon.

"Take a look at her, too; why not?" asked Eben Hull, going back to his coffee mill.

"Gentlemen, I'm obliged to you. I will do it. I am not a man of words but of deeds. If I am successful"—a pale pink wave flushed his cheek as the speaker raised a worn cardcase in his blue-veined hand—"I will be at church with Miss Melissa tomorrow."

"Hear! hear!" cried the doctor, thumping the floor with his hickory stick; and "he! he!" tittered the deacon; "she ain't seen the inside of the meetin' 'us this thirty year."

"All the better, suhs," said Dangerfield Clay; "and now, gentlemen, I invite you individually"—he swept the group with his cardcase—"to my wedding breakfast, *in futuro*."

"Lord! she'll kill him!" said Eben Hull, from the depths of the coffee sack.

"If you'll onhitch and follow me," said the deacon generously, "I'll turn ye off, down to the forks, onto a straight road that don't pass a house till ye fetch up at Melissy's. Ye can't lose the way if ye try;—fool-critter though ye be!" he added to himself.

"Take me along?" asked the doctor.

"Why sartin', if so be you're going my way."

"I am," said the doctor, and shut his mouth like a knife with a stiff spring.

The deacon's team led the way, down past the sawmill, over the brook and up the hill.

"Keep straight ahead!" shouted the driver over his shoulder as they reached the forks, and Dangerfield Clay lifted his hat and went creaking on.

"Doctor," said the deacon, "if I might be so bold, where be you a-goin'?"

"'Tisn't large business, I'll admit," said the doctor, "and I shan't tell my wife, but—you know that clump of cedars just across the road from Melissa's. I'd like to hang around there a bit and see what happens."

"Jest's you say," replied the deacon slowly, but a springlike smile widened across the furrows of his weatherbeaten face.

Meanwhile Dangerfield Clay, on the direct road to fortune, threw the reins carelessly over the dash-board, smoothed his fair hair, and pulled one corner of a fine old handkerchief into view from his vest pocket. He was at peace. An enchanting vision blurred his brain; a vision of green fields and pleasant meadows, of run-

ning brooks and bird songs, and a worthy, well-dressed gentleman directing his hirelings.

"Buzzing about"—the deacon's words recurred to his mind. "Yes," he mused, "a capable woman, of Solomon's sort; her price is far above rubies; the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. And what would she be like?" Dangerfield Clay was fond of musing. Not like his southern Amelia, nor his western Eliza. No, no; she would be a resolute New England gentlewoman, just withering a little like an over-ripe peach, and with the same delicious color.

The white horse was also in a reverie, walking in his sleep. Then he stopped, of his own accord, for once this had been his home. To Dangerfield Clay it seemed a good omen. Still abroad in pleasant fields of fancy he dismounted, with youth in all his muscles. With cardcase and gloves in hand and pretty speeches welling up in his throat, he knocked. There was no response. Again he knocked and listened.

Presently a wooden leg seemed to be approaching from a distance. Or was it a crutch? The door clung at the top, then

opened with a sudden burst, and a severe old face like a tragic mask glared through green glasses at Dangerfield Clay. His hat was in his hand, and he stood courteously bent, presenting his card. The figure before him, tall and gaunt, wore the linsey-woolsey short gown and petticoat of another generation, blue woolen stockings, and brown carpet-slippers, man's size. A false front of blue-black hair under a rusty black cap made a wrinkled triangle of the forehead, and came well down over the ears. The thin lips drooped in a cruel curve. The crutch under one arm seemed a weapon as she shook it menacingly at the mild intruder.

"Go away!" she cried, in a manlike voice, "I don't want it!"

"But, Madam—"

"I tell you I won't have it! Take it away! Lucindy!"

She raised her voice and rapped on the wall with her crutch. As no one answered, she turned and reopened the door through which she had come. "Come here, Lucindy Dow," she called. "I can't fool away my time with this somebody-or-other. Don't leave him alone a

minit. And don't let him in if you can help it. He won't eat you—by his looks! And call Tige if you can't get rid of him. Go along now and don't be a fool.”

Miss Melissa disappeared, and a young woman came timidly forward, dusting particles of flour from her hands. She was noticeably in her first youth; a tall, thin figure, in scanty mourning, with the furtive look of an ill-used creature.

“Will you walk in, sir?” she asked shyly, conscious quite painfully of her floury apron and a foolish wish to remove it. As Dangerfield Clay, hat in hand, stepped over the threshold, back behind the clump of cedars the deacon shook the reins and the doctor leaned back in convulsive, silent laughter.

“Got in, as I'm a living soul,” he gasped. But the deacon only said, “What the posset!” and it sounded like an oath.

When Lucinda Dow closed the door she had no idea what to do next. She took the proffered bit of pasteboard and looked blindly at it upside down. Then she led the way into the darkened parlor, rolled up a green window



shade which let in a bewildering light, and said faintly, "Will you take a seat, sir?"

"After you, Madam," replied the unusual guest, with a Roger de Coverley bow, holding his hat, his gloves, and his cardcase with unconcern.

The courtly speech, the gracious ease of manner, struck the girl as something from a far other planet in which she had no footing. All day long she had been berated for slowness at her tasks, and her very soul was tired—the soul of a dependent, slaving for the bread that was grudged her. If an elderly angel had suddenly alighted at her feet, folded his wings, and said simply, "After you, Madam," in that tone of voice, she would have stepped before him joyfully, fearlessly, into any unknown sphere. And if Dangerfield Clay had been the angel he looked to her at that moment, he could not have divined her inmost soul with keener intelligence; and the chivalry of the Southern gentleman was hot in his veins.

"Miss Lucinda," he began, and she thrilled as she listened; "will you do me the honor for a few brief moments to hear what I have to say? You will perhaps in the kindness of



your heart pardon the abruptness of a lonely—I was about to say a God-forsaken man. Not so, not so, dear lady, for I think—I trust—He has answered my prayer. I have a simple little home of my own, and I am all alone. My hearthstone is desolate. I need a congenial spirit—truly I do. Indeed, dear lady, I feel that I should not say this so suddenly. You are surprised. You are shocked. But, if I may be permitted to say it, the moment my eyes rested upon you I knew in my heart that *you* were my congenial spirit. I fear I distress you;—pardon me—”

Lucinda feared she was losing her senses. Always ordered about, deference and sweet names alike unknown, her poor, sad heart that had fluttered all day with weakness now beating madly in her ears, she shook her head, speechless, while her frightened eyes turned toward the door.

“You do not know me yet,” Dangerfield Clay continued in beguiling tones; “but think it over, make inquiries about me. I am known in the town.”

Lucinda was shaking with fear and joy;—fear lest this should not be what it seemed,—

joy that she was sought after all, like other women.

"You are agitated," the gentle voice said. Lucinda had dreamed of sounds akin to this in realms of upper air after this weary toiling world had ceased to be.

"Do not speak now," he added, rising and lifting her shaking hand to his lips, while she was stricken with fear lest it should be floury. "Tomorrow, if you will allow me, I will bring my credentials that you may know I am a gentleman—a man of honor."

It was then that Lucinda found her voice, a voice strange to herself. "I don't want those—those—" she said.

As Dangerfield Clay parted with Lucinda at the door he said casually, "I shall come tomorrow in my chaise to take you to church if you will allow me"; and Lucinda replied recklessly, "I guess I can get away."

"And if *she* tries to prevent?" he asked, timidly, it must be confessed, for so brave a spirit.

"It won't make a bit of difference," she said proudly; and he recognized the congenial soul he had so long despaired of finding.

"My horse and chaise, such as they are, will be at your service by first bell-ringing," he said gaily.

As the door closed, softer than it need—through deference to Miss Melissa—Lucinda said to herself, "I would go in anything in the world, anywhere in the world, with him!"

And Dangerfield Clay went to his lonely home, exalted. The white horse that had drooped so long at the hitching post caught the spirit that thrilled along the reins, and Eben Hull looked and wondered as they sped past.

"Goin' like all possessed," he said; then added thoughtfully, "I'd give the best supper I ever hope to eat to 'a' been on the spot."

"Mean trick enough," said the doctor, drawing figures with his hickory stick in the dust before the door, "to send him off on a tomfool chase, poor devil, with all his airs and graces. I shan't get over being ashamed till—till—"

"Till the next time," supplemented Eben Hull; "don't blame it on me, Doctor."

"I don't," said the doctor, humbly.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Sabbath day dawned clear and bright.

The birds were about their servile labor or vain recreation forbidden to man. The church bell pealed for the last time with a quavering echo on the air, as deacon and doctor met by chance at the church steps, and together turned at the sound of wheels. A white horse was toiling up the steep ascent to the church, followed by a swaying buggy.

## A NEW ENGLAND FESTIVAL

IT was a poor little corner of a rocky New England township, but not too poor nor too rocky for humanity to live and die and be buried in.

There was to be a funeral two miles away; and on this bright August afternoon came rumors of a great gathering of the clans. No fiery Scottish cross could have borne tidings faster than this somber bit of news was passed on and on like a word of command from farm to farm.

"Well, poor Aunt Almy's gone at last," said my hostess, with a final turn of the wooden button that shut her blue china treasures into the small cupboard over the fireplace. "I thought might be you'd enjoy going to the funeral?" she added with interrogation in her tone.

"But she was a stranger to me," I replied, with inborn reluctance to thrusting myself needlessly into scenes of grief.

"'Twon't make one mite o' diff'rence," was

the brisk reply. "Father, he's busy's ever was with that rowen crop down to far meadow, thinkin' it's likely to set in an' rain. But he didn't take the colt, an' I can hitch up an' drive just as good's men folks. He's dre'dful sorry not to go. It's the first funeral he's missed since I do' know when. I don't take much stock in its rainin'. Moon ain't in the right quarter, an' I observed the sun set clear last night.

"He remembers Almy from the time folks first begun to call her 'old maid.' "

"Was she very old?" I ventured, as some sort of response was waited for.

"Well, yes; she was—considerable. Seems to me I'd say so, even for Stony Ridge, where 'tis said folks mostly dries up an' blows away. Foolish sort o' say now, ain't it? Yes, she was considerable old—risin' of seventy. Well there! the' ain't but just one house left standin' where the' use' to be four five long ago's I can recollect. Some chimneys left, an' them beginnin' to tottle! Kind o' creepy I say when you think back to how they was young once, an' built accordin' to their notion; settled down an' raised a family, an' all died off or married off or moved away, till finally the old houses seemed

to sort o' give out an' die off, too, to keep 'em comp'ny like. Don't it seem so? And all the trouble they went through first to last! Poor crops mebbe, an' mor'gages on the farm; things gettin' run down, babies havin' scarlet fever an' whoopin' cough, every soul of 'em that was born into this world; an' marryin' poor, likely, some of 'em that lived to grow up. Now an' then a drinkin' one, an' boys gettin' into all sorts o' mischief, an' mebbe goin' out West to start again."

"Perhaps it was the best thing they could do," I suggested.

"Well, yes; for some of 'em that wouldn't ever amount to anything. Just as well to get 'em off where they wa'n't talked about so much. Aunt Almy's father, now, he made a sight o' talk hereabout. Name in everybody's mouth. My boys didn't grow up," she added, with a comfortable sigh. "His folks was weakly, an' the boys seemed to take after them. I don't see why. I was rugged, an' it wa'n't 'sins of the fathers visited onto the children.' But I must say I've been spared some things; an' a little row in the buryin' ground ain't the worst that happens to folks."



There was a brief pause which called for no response.

"If you can't go, I'll step over an' ask Tilly Chris; but, like as not, he's got his crop all in by this time, an' then he's sure to go. He's young an' spry, an' he'd hate to miss it."

"Who is Tilly Chris?" I asked, with an uneasy consciousness of curiosity.

"Well, of course, you ain't expected to know so soon, an' not residin' here, too. You see there was two Tillys, first cousins named after their grandmother; an' they married two twin brothers, Christopher Pike an' Columbus Pike. Not that I think much of such far-fetched names myself, but it's none o' my concern one way or another. So when the's a call to speak of them, we say, 'Tilly Chris' an' 'Tilly Clum.' Sounds queer, I presume, to strangers, but we're all use' to it."

There was no question as to my desire to attend the funeral—that was taken for granted. But there might be some unknown disabilities that did not stand in the way of the native, trivial in their way, and of secondary importance, such as letter writing and the reading of

books other than "Beckwith's Almanac," and "Young's Night Thoughts."

"I can go if you wish me too," I said, with selfish reluctance, thinking of the joy of a country afternoon with an unopened box of books that the stage had dropped at the door just before dinner.

"Don't you *wan'* to go?" my hostess asked in cold surprise. There was an air of something lacking about me in her tone; as if Nature, usually beneficent, had grudged me some essential faculty; left out some legitimate source of pleasure.

"I thought you'd be real pleased," she added, dejectedly. "Why, I presume, we haven't missed a funeral, him an' me, for upward of thirty years. Wet or dry, hot or cold, freeze or thaw, we was there—always to be depended on. But I'm free to say I don't enjoy goin' alone anywheres the way I used to. I was spryer then, an' could get in an' out of any sort of wagon. Yes, or cart, when I use' to go up meadow hayin' time, foolish like, year we was just married. Didn't like to have him out o' sight. All is, colt's good to go, but he hates to stan' still when you're gettin' in, so it's

handy to have somebody along to hold the lines. He'd rather I would; tho it's seldom enough I go to the store even without him. If I do, they bring things out to me."

"Shall I go down to the meadow and tell him?" I asked, thinking it proper that some ceremony should be observed on such an occasion.

"Oh, my, no! It's too hot! When we start I'll just set a broom alongside the door an' he'll know."

What connection a broom had with funeral rites I did not try to think out. There are mysteries of this twentieth century as profound as those that obtained in the young years of Greece, though we build no visible temple for them.

In due time the colt came to the door; a shaggy creature, of the color of a faded cow, with lank mane and tail somewhat knotted with burrs, a dropping head, hollow back, and several worn places on his sides and hips, where some misfit harness or much rubbing against the stall had spoiled the growth of hair.

But, for all that, the colt had a wise eye that took in the situation, and an alert instinct that

missed the curb. So as soon as his mistress had dismounted, slowly, and quite bunchily like Dickens's *Peggotty*, he swerved toward a great clump of tiger lilies that adorned the front yard, and snapped off two tall stalks viciously.

"You won't do that again, I can tell you!" cried his driver, as she pulled up the curb and snapped it in place with a vigorous, freckled hand, adding to me in a quiet aside: "If you'll just stand by his head while I step in an' get my hat, an' give him a han'ful of grass 'f he gets jerky," and I pulled up the long blades with fragrant heads of clover, and held them so far from his nose, that the great feet coming nearer and nearer and the loud breathing with a wheeze in some deep chest region forced me quite up on the top stone step.

"I thought likely!" my hostess exclaimed, as she thrust a stick through the latch to let any chance passerby know that she was not in and set the kitchen broom against the door. "He knows the minute you're afraid. Back there, Ceph! you old——" and she laid a strong hand on the bit. "Now then, if you'll take the lines, so, an' hold 'em tight. Here, I guess I can

manage it an' get in by myself. He knows better'n to fool with me."

"What is his name?" I asked, deferentially, as we went out at the great gate which a passing boy was told to shut behind us.

"Why, we call him Ceph? 'Twas Parson Tuller named him for father when we'd as many as six, an' got all out o' names ourselves. The' was *Gray* an' *Prince* an' *Major* an' *Gen'ral* an' *Jube*; an' we couldn't think of another proper name to save us."

"Why not *Tom* or *Dick*?" I asked, futilely.

"Why, you see some o' the folks we know had them names, an' all is they might not like it. So one day Parson Tuller was up in the horse lot, an' father says, 'What's a good name for a colt?' He wa'n't a man to make words; an' the parson looked him in the eye—the colt's eye I mean—an' he says as if he was thinkin' in his mind to find somethin' suitable, *Bucepholis*; right out quick, like that. Some great name or another I presume, an' we didn't like to seem to slight it since he'd been so obligin' and took the trouble to study it up. An' Ceph he is, to this day; for the other was too long to speak suddenly, an' that's the way he has to be spoke

to, as you can see. Sounds foolish to you, I'll be bound, to call him the colt; but the others was sold off when they was three or four years old, an' he seemed kind o' young an' frisky to us then. An' he does now, I'm free to say, long side the old horse. Get up! Now if that ain't just like you, Ceph, stoppin' in the middle o' the road, an' all them teams comin' up behind. I declare, I'm mortified at you, Ceph!"

But the colt stood still, with an air of perfect unconcern, reaching out a hampered nose toward the alder bushes that leaned near and hindering the long procession of wagons coming after us, till Tilly Chris and her husband drove on ahead and offered to attach us to the rear of their buggy. This neighborly kindness was graciously accepted, and as the leading horse set off at a good pace, Ceph decided that it was the part of discretion to keep up.

It was humiliating to be towed to a funeral in this fashion, as if horse and family needed persuasion to do a good deed; so at the top of the first long hill the colt's mistress begged to have the rope loosed, adding that it would be well not to get too far ahead, as she hated dreadfully to be late at the funeral.



It must be said for Bucephalus that he was a horse of dignity and spirit; for after his own self-respecting fling—a silent protest perhaps at being controlled by womenfolks—there was no more occasion for the leading string. And he kept up so well in the procession, with such decided setting down of his feet, that not only did we take the dust of all the teams ahead, but passed it on as well to the long line coming after us. No ordinary dust was this—just thickened and glorified trails of light, sifting over us and softening the landscape.

It was a wonderful road. No sooner did we climb to the top of a stony hill with painful effort and much lathering of the horses under the harness, than we dropped as painfully down, Ceph holding back faithfully, even cheerfully, with a sitting down effect in the steepest places, but with no disposition to be childish. The gravity of the occasion had reached his brain at last, and his grateful mistress said there'd be no more foolin' now that he understood.

“And he can walk b'utiful to the grave,” she added. “You'll see how when they begin to slow up. Why, when he was young—younger,



that is, we was on the way to Deacon Swift's funeral, an' he wouldn't walk in line. My! wa'n't I scared? An' mortified, too. First, he'd pull out one side, then over to th' other; an' when father jerked him in sharp, what did he do but wheel round, an' go smack over the stone wall! I can show you the very identical spot. There; you see that big elder clump ahead? 'Twas just th' other side of that; an' the gap's in the wall yet where he fetched down the top stones.

"But he was 'shamed enough, I can tell you, when the whole procession went past, folks afoot and all, an' he had to be took out o' the buggy to get 'em both back into the road.

"Father give him a few lashes then an' there to let him know who was master. He's a mild man, an' didn't train him the way some would; but Ceph knew just as well's you would that he wa'n't to cut up any more didoes goin' to funerals. And he never did. I don't count this time, for you see he didn't rightly sense what we was settin' off for.

"Like as not he'd thought it over an' made up his mind I wanted somethin' another from the store; an' when we took the wrong road he

suspicioned I didn't know what I was about, an' so just stopped to let me straighten out things in my own mind. Anybody can think better keepin' still, you know.

"See how good he was when they took that rope off! Oh, he won't disgrace himself that way again! He's thinkin' it all over, I know, by the way that off ear lops. Father'd say he was philosophizin'."

It was a beautiful country that we were jogging and creaking along; poor enough for meadow or planting, but lovely for situation. From the tops of the hills, oaks and chestnuts stood up against the white, summer clouds, and bees and butterflies stopped at every thistle. Prodigal nature loves to shower gifts on waste and lovely lands in token of her tremendous reserves.

In the lowlands the drought had not yet yellowed the foliage, and the hedges were riotously thick and green; white and fragrant with clethra, the sweet pepper bush of New England, which the bees hung about with contented blurring of the soft air; and deep, yellow heads of tansy, whose Greek name stands for immortality, its strong tonic odor typical of the

bitter herbs of the Paschal season. Goldenrod was in full bud, with here and there an early blossom, and the intense purple of iron weed reared its royal banner under the tall heads and coarse leaves of Joe-Pye-weed, sown by the artist hand of nature that brings into gracious harmony her blues and pinks and purples of all degrees.

"I declare, if there ain't pennyr'yal right in the horses' tracks!" broke out the colt's driver, suddenly. "Did you ever see such a smell! B'utiful, ain't it? I'll stop an' gether some when we go home, if so be Ceph'll wait. I like to keep it up garret long o' boneset an' chamomile an' mint."

We had left the dusty thoroughfare and were climbing up a narrow, green lane with overgrown wheel ruts strewed with last year's leaves, through which young oaks and chestnuts sent up shoots, and dark green pipsissewa spread its exquisite growth. Above this soft track birches whispered together, and pines sifted the wind that passed through their tops, and gave out the balmy odor that is like nothing else in the tree kingdom.

We caught glimpses of sailing, white clouds

through delicate twigs of alder and black birch that leaned quite across the road and brushed our faces when we failed to stoop in time.

Presently we left even this shadow of a road, and turned into a rough cart track between great boulders, where some hidden spring glistened in the long grass, and the cardinal flower knee deep in the water tossed up its splendor of color that makes even the wood lily pale.

"I'd just love to get some of that!" cried Ceph's mistress, with a strong, backward pull on the reins. "And I would, too, if it wa'n't for a funeral. You go on, Ceph."

"And why not for a funeral?" I asked, with the simpleness of an alien.

"For a funeral!"

The rebuke in the tone was sufficient reply. It might have been inferred from my lack of enthusiasm at the start that I knew nothing of these proprieties.

The cart path wound up and up by easy stages, passing the kitchen door on its slow way to an unused barn with sagging roof and gaping sides.

The stone step leading to the front door was quite choked with grass and blackberry vines. It must have been years since any one had driven that way. So one by one the teams halted at the kitchen porch, then passed on to the shady side of the barn, where the horses were taken out and tethered to the backs of the wagons, whinneying softly to each other with reticent comment on the quality of deep grass and clover at their feet but out of reach.

It was a little, brown, shingled house of one story, weatherbeaten to the universal tint of rocks and stone walls and lichens. Nature gathers such gently into her large embrace, and lulls it to its final repose. But over its porch ran the wild splendor of a trumpet creeper into whose scarlet horns the humming birds thrust themselves half out of sight with a purring sound. It must have been the one strenuous voice of animate nature here at other times.

There was no sign of dog or cat, nor of the universal chicken that makes the abomination of desolation on the hardened face of earth.

Two downcast neighbors from a mile or more away came to the door, and one, the bolder of them, asked us to come into the keepin' room

and take chairs. They spoke in whispers as if we stood before a shrine.

It was difficult to explain why I preferred the porch, and impossible for them to understand why I should not care to see her that had passed away. One capable woman detached herself from a slowly formed group, and urged the matter as we stood under the shade of the trumpet vine.

"Nobody's made us acquainted," she began, modestly, with native dignity and sweetness; "but I hope you'll excuse me for taking the liberty. I presume you're a stranger here—one of the ladies intimated as much; and, of course, you didn't know Aunt Almy.

"But we've fixed her up b'utiful, and I'd take it kindly if you'd step in and look at her. She's laid out in her old, black alapaccy. 'Twas all she had, tho I wish't had been silk. We've sponged it off and pressed it, and my girls made her a nice cap with white ribbons, and she's got two of her own white lilies in her hand. She looks b'utiful, if I do say it, and I wish't you'd step in."

So I went within by way of amends for my tardy courtesy, and to praise the generous care



that had been so lovingly given by those in no way akin. It was a sweet, strong face, with thin, brown hair softly powdered with gray under the lace cap, and a look of absolute peace on the clear-cut features.

There were no mourners, for Aunt Almy was alone in the world. And there was only a deacon-service; for Parson Tuller had died some months earlier, after more than a half century of faithful ministering to his feeble parish. But there were remarks from two tremulous deacons, very old men from whom the joy of even middle life had departed, who made much of the occasion, with mournful allusions to the brevity of life, and the surety of a better country that the best among us might hope to attain. Then the audience that quite filled the three small rooms lifted up quavering voices, with here and there one fresh and young, and sang, "Why Should We Mourn Departed Friends," to the heart-rending tune of *China*, whose mournful cadences wailed through the narrow rooms and passages, filling the house quite full of melancholy. I thought of it shut in like the odor of bitter herbs, with the youth of Aunt Almy, and only going out of it when



the framework went to ruin, and let in the sun, and summer wind to sweeten and scatter it.

Four withered old men lifted the plain coffin from the keeping room table and carried it haltingly to the door, at which younger men took their places. Then the long procession followed across a meadow to the back of the garden wall, where two dark, lichened headstones leaned away as if shrinking from the newly opened grave.

The garden was a miracle of neatness and bloom; for its owner and lover had died suddenly, and nothing had suffered from neglect.

A mulberry tree, in full fruit, hung over the wall, and the robins were jubilantly returning thanks among its branches.

Along the tidy walks crossing each other at right angles blossomed late sweet peas and nasturtiums, bordered by delicate sweet alyssum, pink-edged poppies, mignonette, and the dainty blue fairy flax. Jasmine past blooming climbed and fell over the wall at the garden's foot, making a background for flaming hollyhocks, blue larkspur, tiger lilies and marigolds.

Scarlet poppies grew rank and high in full

view from the keeping room window, and the lonely soul who watched their springing time and summer must have loved them like sunny-hearted friends. To the north, just where the land fell off suddenly over masses of rock that guarded a deep, stony pasture-valley, stood a single, high boulder, split into two by a sturdy, many-branched chestnut tree that leaned its ripening burrs within easy reach. At its foot blackberry vine and wild clematis wrestled together in dense masses. Rude steps cut in the lower half of the rock led to a broad platform to which the tree lent a back.

"She use' to keep a red shawl folded there to sit on," said the woman who had first invited me in. "They say she was a master hand to climb up there and read, all by herself, day in and day out.

"My Tommy spoke with her there just a few hours before she passed away. He was after blackberries, and strayed off as boys will, and she asked him to come and pick some."

"Did she have many books?" I asked, in the pause that followed.

"Oh, a sight! There was 'Paradise Lost' and Pollock's 'Course of Time'; that's a b'utiful

book; I presume you've heard of it? and Martin Tupper's 'Poetical Works,' and some stories, and Walter Scott's books—quite a shelf full; and—," she hesitated and dropped her voice— "some says she had a big book, coarse print, named Dant's Hell, and that she was fond of it. Livin' all stark alone she couldn't help bein' a little queer I say, and there's them that'll bear me out in it—meanin' no disrespect to the dead. But over and above them all 'tis said she set great store by William Shakespeare's 'Poems.' She was a reader! They say he wrote plays, too. The minister told me once, himself, that he'd read one or two of them, and there was good in them.

"But I do' know. We wasn't brought up that way."

## II

The neighbors who had cared for the last of her family with generous giving of time and service stayed behind to set the house in order and lock the door. One by one the teams jolted along the cart path, but with a jauntier air than that of the early afternoon. It was the welcome breathing spell after the repression

of the service, like the beginning of a new life—like what we imagine of a resurrection when shadows flee away.

Ceph was led out last, and as he stepped slowly along, still in contemplative mood, with no ambition to outstrip faster teams, I had time to impress the whole beautiful, lonely landscape on my mind.

The reins lay loosely on the colt's back, and he foraged from the roadside without rebuke. "I've been thinkin' an' thinkin'," said his driver. "'Twas real sober, wa'n't it? Mebbe you'd take int'rest in hearin' about her that's just passed away."

Not only that, but I was filled with compunction at having been such an unwilling guest on an occasion that these busy fellow beings never omitted; and made what decent amends were possible.

"She was a proper nice looking girl," the narrator began; "and pretty disposed. Not that I knew her so very well, for it's lonesome up here, an' she didn't go to meetin'. They say she didn't go to school when she was a girl.

"Her ma had been a teacher, an' I expect she learnt her. But before my day she use' to

walk to meetin' time and again; an' it come about that my brother Cephas took to carryin' her home. She wa'n't more than sixteen, I presume, and he was some older.

"I was a little girl, but I use' to hear the folks speakin' about it. When he took her to singin' school, ma said he was keepin' comp'ny with her. And I s'pose he was. He wa'n't one to make words about it.

"Well, the next spring, just about apple-blow time, her aunt come down from Boston for a spell an' wanted that Almy should go home with her. 'Twas dre'dful hard for her mother to let 'er go, but they made out 'twas best for the girl, an' you know mothers don't think about their own feelin's. You see her father was a drinkin' man, an' 'twa'n't any too pleasant there when he had his spells.

"The boys got away from home soon's they could; for they do say he was abusive at times, an' you know boys won't stan' that if they've got any spirit. They done well, too. I expect 'twas the Martin blood. That was on her side. 'Twas a high family; pretty spoken, pretty behaved, an' always tryin' to have the children *be* somebody.

"All is I don't see how Almy's mother ever come to marry Tom Giles. He wanted her bad, I s'pose, an' girls married before they come to know their own minds, them days. He was well enough when he was young, accordin' to what I've heard tell, an' good lookin' as folks goes; but han'some is as han'some does, I hold. And he never 'mounted to a row of pins. He'd sooner sit 'round in the tavern an' tell stories an' treat, way they use' to them days, than to be farmin' of it. An' tho 'twa'n't much of a farm to start with, he'd neighbors that made a good livin', poor soil an' all. One of 'em left some money in the bank, too. 'Twa'n't much—a couple of hundred or so, but it helped start the boys. Well, this Tom Giles, as I was sayin', tho he'd got a likely family, smart workers and all, didn't try to bring 'em up. Just let 'em come up. If the boys wanted to plant corn two or three years a-goin' in the same place, not knowin' any better, why he let 'em. An' he used up his best land, an' let it go to pastur' when he might've had tol-rable crops just as well as not.

"But he wouldn't turn his hand over. Smoke a pipe an' drink—drink an' smoke a pipe; 'twas



all the business he ever calc'lated on. Mis' Giles was a close-mouthed lady, an' nobody ever heard a word from her, even when the boys left an' the stock was sold off. She couldn't go to meetin' after that, an' nobody went there scarcely, 'twas so far away. An' besides, nobody wanted to run acrost him.

"He had a raspy sort of tongue when he was in liquor, an' that was the heft o' the time. Seems like gossipin' about neighbors behind their backs; but 'twas town talk. Besides they're all dead an' gone now, all but the boys out West. What be I talkin' about! Why, they was a sight older'n Almy, an' I presume the' ain't one of 'em above ground now, as we say. Where did I get to? Oh, yes; Almy's aunt that took her off to Boston, an' her poor mother never so much as sayin' ay, yes or no.

"The aunt was a hard workin' woman an' took boarders. An' Almy was to help, an' have her board an' clothes.

"She was a proper pretty girl, I told you before, an' held her head high, proud-like as all her mother's folks was. And her aunt done well by her. She had books to read, when the' was any time, an' two pink calico dresses for



summer, besides a white muslin for meetin', an' a good blue merino for winter. Tilly Chris told me all about it. Her grandmother was neighbor to them, an' she an' Almy was great friends.

"Well, the old folks lived on, kind o' hand to mouth, poor's poverty all the time. An' Mis' Giles she spun some for folks that got behind-hand into their fall work, an' wove rag carpets. No joke that, weavin' rag carpet.

"Ev'ry spring an' ev'ry fall Almy come home for a visit, pretty as a posy, with a new, purple calico mebbe, for her ma, an' what money her aunt could spare, which wa'n't much, tho she was open-handed. I use' to hear our folks tell all about it. And she'd coax some o' the neighbors to take them two to church, an' make jell to pay for't. Almy wa'n't the sort to take favors from anybody. She did make b'utiful jell—pick the berries an' grapes herself, an' they'd furnish sugar. 'Twas winter set in, in earnest, when she had to go back.

"I presume Cephas would've done as much for her as any of 'em, if she'd a-let him. But the young folks was all crazy after her, boys an' girls alike. Seemed as if they wore off the grass round the front door short as if sheep'd

nibbled it, with their teams drivin' up day an' night.

"Don't look that way now, does it? But that's the way it use' to be told. Tired o' my long story? Well, I'm glad if you ain't. Father says you can't stop me when I get a-goin' more'n a windmill in a gale. I get so intent on it, you see, I forget everything.

"Ma use' to say Cephas took it hard her goin' back. Not that he said so—he wa'n't like me; but he kind o' peaked an' pined, an' didn't relish his vittles. And ma was the best of cooks.

"Why, she believed he'd a-gone clear up to Boston to see her if it took ev'ry cent he'd got, he was that lonesome.

"But folks didn't jig about, them days, way they does now. Just stuck to their bus'ness steady, an' laid up a trifle year by year, an' bymeby got to be forehanded. My father, he'd laid up five hundred dollars in the bank before he died. But Cephas wa'n't twenty-one then, an' worked for his keep. When he was, he got his freedom suit. Ma made it for him. But the' wa'n't any money to go with it, except as he done extry work an' was allowed some for

it—a York shillin' a day, overtime, I guess 'twas.

“Bymeby he somehow got onto a big farm, six or seven miles away, when John grew along to take his place; an' we 'lowed he'd get Almy after a spell.”

“And didn't he?” I asked, with deep interest.

“I was goin' to tell you. When she come home next time the' was a sight o' sickness, an' she went 'round an' set up nights, an' was that busy days she couldn't even go to meetin'. An' Cephas he took it pretty hard. Not that he said so, but it was his only chance, you know; an' ma would have it he looked peakeder'n ever. She took sick herself, to end up with, an' had to stay a week over time. Tilly's grandmother took her back, for she wa'n't fit to go alone. She was a girl then, an' had been home visitin' her own folks. But she went sooner'n she would, on Almy's account. 'Twas a terrible long stage ride. But now comes the worst of it. When she come home next time, sort o' lively seein' all her folks, she let out that one o' the aunt's boarders was keepin' comp'ny with Almy.

“A spruce young fellow, she said he was, an' likely into the bargain. He was part owner in

a book store, with some money laid by, an' he was farse to get married; but Almy wouldn't.

"Well, it went on and on; an' it was a proper, pretty match, her aunt said; but Almy, she held off. An' in some way they found out that he wanted to go home with her an' talk it over with her folks, an' she wouldn't let him.

"Her aunt would've told him fast enough what the matter was, an' made no bones about it; but Almy as much as said she wasn't to. You see I use' to hear all this from ma, over an' over again.

"As I was tellin' you before, Almy was proud, like all the Martins, an' I s'pose she didn't wan' to take anybody she set store by to such a tumble-down ramshackle sort of a place as her house was then, with a poor sot for a father. An' I don't know's I blame her. Her mother was nice as could be; but I tell you 'tis a terrible thing for a girl to be ashamed of her own father.

"An' so it went on for a year or two, an' Almy, bein' pretty close-mouthed, likely didn't tell him the reason she wouldn't let 'im go home with 'er, an' he got offish, man-fashion, because he couldn't have his own way; an' 'twan't long till he up an' married a city lady. An' 'twas the

year after that Mis' Giles took sick, an' Almy had to come home. He got worse an' worse, kind o' drinkin' his brains soft; but he didn't die. Such critters never does. An', after a spell, she kind o' faded an' faded away, an' you couldn't scercely tell when the breath re'lly went out of her."

"Almy?" I asked, with a lapse of intellect.

"My, no! her mother. Almy's only just gone now. An' Tom Giles he held on, an' held on; and ev'ry cent they could rake an' scrape went for liquor. I'd a-throwed him onto the town! Why, Almy raised chickens, they said, an' planted corn an' potaties, an' tended to 'em all herself, or they'd starved. Not but that the neighbors would've looked after her some, but she was that proud, I presume, if they'd sent in things she'd have hove 'em outdoors. Well, here we be; and if I didn't forget that penny-r'yal! Come right over it, an' didn't get a sniff of it. An' a powerful pretty smell it has, too."

### III

It was the first part of the week following the funeral. I had been for a tramp over the

hills, and came home just before sunset with an armful of boneset and mountain mint, the best thing in the world for a cough, I was told, and a necessity in every household.

These would give pleasure all through the long, cold winter, I was sure, and make the very rafters fragrant as they dried slowly under the garret roof.

While I sat to rest a moment on a gray rock under the shade of a clump of chestnuts, and looked off toward the golden sea in which a faint shallop of moon was floating, there was a sudden flurry of bushes pushed aside, and my hostess broke panting through.

"My, but I'm glad to find you so near!" she sighed. "Such news! And he's milkin' still, so I'll just drop down here an' tell you.

"Tilly run over half an hour ago, all burstin' with it; an' I venture it's half over town by this time.

"P'r'aps you didn't take notice; but Sarah Winterses girls stayed to lock up the house that day; an' what do you think! They said no sooner was the teams out o' sight than a man come walkin' up the hill other side. He'd left a black man and a buggy down to the foot, for



they went up garret to see. He had a long box, an' he was dressed up slick, like a city man, an' he had a weed on his hat an' a cane in his hand. An' first he laid down his cane an' pulled off his hat an' set that down, an' he took something out o' the box—for they set up garret an' watched 'im; an' he bent down his head without any hat on, just like he was sayin' a prayer. When he was gone they crep' down stairs an' went over to see what 'twas; an' there was roses an' roses—pink ones—stems long's your arm—laid all 'round the head o' the grave. An' they said come to think it over they was sure he knelt down there with his hat off; but I don't believe it. He'd be too old, an' stiff besides, likely. I s'pose he recollected the pink dresses she use' to wear. Well there! I've no call to say so. Such things do come into your mind, tho, an' stick. And I say 'twas pretty of him, whatever other folks thinks. And his wife likely was passed away by that weed on his hat, an' he'd had time to think back. Queer, ain't it, how we will go back to things that's past an' gone.

“An' the girls thought, an' I b'lieve it myself, that 'twas *him*—why, I hadn't told you

that! an' he'd heard of it, some way, an' he'd come all the way from Boston with a team, to 'tend the funeral.

"I reckon he was disappointed. But Tilly, she thinks he'd rather wait till the folks was gone, an' kind o' have it all to himself, an' no remarks made.

"I wish't he could've seen her, she looked so nice. 'Most pretty if she hadn't been so old. But mebbe he'd rather think of her as she was.

"I've made up my mind, an' Tilly says she has, too, that he's a widower. The weed looks like it. And if his wife had been livin' it might've pestered her to know how much he set store by Almy after all these years. I don't b'lieve he'd done it.

"But it'll all be found out in time. Even Tilly Clum, who's the stay-at-home sort, says she shan't rest till she knows for sure if he's the same, an' what his name is, an' if his wife is dead, an' what fam'ly she left. We'll know all the' is to be known, pretty quick.

"The reason we was so slow gettin' at it before now, you see the Winterses they live over 'cross Five Mile Brook, an' bring down their butter an' fowls once a week for the stage man

to take. An' they drove a good two mile out o' the way to carry the news to Chris. Pike in the up-meadow."

"Did I meet your brother at the funeral?" I asked, with keen sympathy. "For I do not remember your speaking of him, or introducing him. There were so many there."

"Cephas? Why, bless your heart, he's been in heaven these thirty years! Went right from the supper table, as you may say, 'twas that sudden.

"Ma did hope he'd get reconciled an' take a wife; an' she was free to urge him some, as he was gettin' along, an' there'd be nobody to look after him when she was gone. But he wa'n't that sort. We ain't, not one of us.

"When our sort o' folks gets their mind set, they're terrible hard to unset. Might as well try to end over this rock. Well, it did seem kind o' sober up there that day, didn't it? But come to get home, what with the yellow clouds all over, some purple 'round the edges, not quite sundown you recollect—just the way it looks tonight, so sweet an' homey like—'twas diff'rent. Seems as if you could look right through, only the sun blinds you so.

"I always think about Almy when it comes this time o' day—kind o' as if she'd gone back again an' was young. She did look real young, now didn't she, for a person risin' of seventy?"

"Some way as if all the years was droppin' off, droppin' off gradual, soon as she got rid of the body, an' kind of givin' her a new chance to begin over again.

"Why, I expect she's just sittin' down with her ma in the shade o' the glory now—not bein' use' to it so soon—an' talkin' it all over. Cephas, too, mebbe he'll put in a word. *He'd be there!*

"Seems to me, when I stop an' think it over, just like it use' to when I was young an' I'd been off over night to our folkses. When I got back the little fellows they'd come racin' out, hoppin' up an' down, an' hangin' round an' catchin' hold of me, shoutin' out: '*Mummy's got home! Mummy's got home! Mummy's got home!*'; just plain cryin' for joy to see me.

"Seems to me 'twill be same way up there. I wouldn't stand it other ways. I declare to it, if I ain't cryin' myself for joy! An' there's father with his two milk pails—I hear 'im lettin' down the bars this minit, an' I ain't so much

as got the kettle on! I couldn't blame 'im if he spoke up ha'sh to me—workin' away in the hot sun all day long, real tired, an' me off gaddin', enjoyin' myself! But there, he never did in all his life, however deservin' I might be. Come in pretty quick, won't you? I'll have the table set an' the tea a-drawin' in a jiffy. The's quince preserves that he likes; but if you want sweet cream on your baked apples instead—an' you seem to—the's a whole pitcherful sittin' on the butt'ry shelf waitin'. It's been coolin' all day in the well."

THE END





**THE HEART OF A CHILD**



A GRAY DREAM  
THE HEART OF A CHILD

BY  
LAURA WOLCOTT

*VOLUME II*

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## INTRODUCTION

NOT everyone has been a child once, long ago, and then again many years after. The little stories of this volume were written by one whose first days of childhood came, in New England, in the period of 1830, and whose touch with childhood went on in this world until 1916.

The first group of stories were made of the vivid memories of those early days—"the days of the Honored Elders," and of fervent Bible-reading; the second group grew from constant contact with children of our present times, whose quality the future must name. Whether the writer of these stories was feeling life, herself a little child, or the white-haired lover of little children who came to her daily showing their treasures, she bore always deep in her own nature the heart of a child.

E. E. M.

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"IF the Child were to go back to the Garden after fifty years, would it sit on the stone wall and dip its feet in the water, pushing it down

until it pushed back, and looking out to Harbor Woods for Xerxes and the Crusaders? Why not? And if the big timber of the mighty dam has shrunk with the years like the miller, and the breadth of the fall narrowed that a man may leap across it; if the bottomless pits can be sounded with a little longer stick; and the path from the porch is only a sheep-walk up a hand's breadth rise of rock and down again; if the height from which the Almighty called to Adam has a house on it, and the apple tree is bowed and mossy with age; if the Garden itself, like the British Islands, is shrinking from the sea; what matters it, if only the years have left the heart of the Child?"

STORIES OF 1838





## THE CHILD'S CHRISTMAS EVE

FOR three nights before Christmas it snowed and snowed and snowed, sifting down the great stone chimney and making a soft, mysterious hissing on the birch and apple tree logs blazing below. And for three days the sky was like a great gray umbrella let down for protection; and everything seemed to hark for what was coming next.

The Child listened to the pricking and sifting, and long, slow drift of snow on the window panes, and cuddled close under the trundle-bed blankets like a very little bird under brooding wings, oh, so safe and snug, with a great universal lullaby shutting it in to warmth and safety.

On the third day the sun shone, and the island where the Child lived—bound to the land by two bridges—was one great white joy.

The path to the garden was not; nor the stone wall that kept out the sea at its foot; and the place where in day dreams the Almighty talked with Adam under the apple tree was a gleaming hill, a very Mount of Vision.

There was no dull, hindering school this day before Christmas, so the Child, well wrapped up, dragging a little deal sled, could run along as fast as the paths were dug, in a follow-my-leader game; watching with a thrill the great shovelfuls of glistening snow tossed up till they made a wall impassable as the one of China that the story books said was true. The Child did not believe it. So many strange, untrue things lived in its world, why should they not in the lesser world of books?

After the snow a gentle rain fell and turned all the trees and bushes to silver and glass with rubies and emeralds for blossoms when the sun came out. The rapture of it was too great to be held in behind the Child's eyes and so overran them; and the cold added made prisms through which the world was a celestial rainbow like that about the Great White Throne. How good of Father to read that chapter this very morning! Did he do it on purpose, or did it just happen! One never could know.

The Child had not suspected any such beautiful thing between the covers of the Great Brown Book, where near the middle common names and ages were written with a pen and

faded ink after all the wars were over and David and Solomon were gathered to their fathers, and where once, farther over toward the end, it was said in printing that the pure in heart shall see God.

What was the "pure in heart"? And wouldn't anything be terribly afraid to see God? With *Our Lord* it would be different, for He had been a little child and His pictures were beautiful. And He loved little children even when He was a man, and let them come to Him just as if they were not a trouble.

The mill pond was one great sheet of ice tucked under blankets and comforters of snow, quite invisible,—just a part of the impossible world that made no sound. The water had struggled and ruffled over the dam, and frozen into giants wringing and tussling together, and the very river itself made no sound under its piled-up cover. Icicles hung like great fringes all along its banks, and other icicles reached up from below to meet them, lovelier than anything in *Cinderella*—the Child's one fairy book.

Then a black cloud like an evil spirit rose high in the north and leaned over the garden. The Child had never heard that

The North wind is man's wind  
Entangled with his fate,

nor yet that

The South wind is God's wind  
And blows from Paradise.

It wondered at the quick command to drop the sled and run to the porch, for the Thing that bowed the trees and snapped their loaded branches was an invisible Dread riding by that nevertheless in some blind way spread ruin in its track.

The Child shivered, but not from cold, and its knees smote together. The Thing came madly shrieking as it flew, and half stunned the Child on the threshold. But the good door shut it out—the door and mother, and there was nothing more to fear. Not even dreams could hurt where mother was. It was so different in the house. There was warmth, and a blazing fire, and an apple roasting and sizzling on the hearth; and to make up for all out of doors the Child was told that when the real dark came it would be Christmas Eve, and “if it was good it might go to The Church—not its own—and see the candles.” How could one be good,—good enough? Just by sitting still in

one place and speaking properly only when spoken to—never forgetting “thank you” and “please,” never asking for more pudding at table, never making crumbs nor eating too fast nor dropping its spoon? Oh, it would be so good! What did “the candles” mean? It was not the day of perpetual questionings and demands. It was the day of the Honored Elders, quite lost out of the present century; and the Child breathed softly and thought and thought. Once in the dim past, at a grandmother’s house three hours to the north as the horse travels, it remembered seeing a great kettle of hot fat with strings laid across a rod between two chairs, lifted at intervals, let down into the fat and raised dripping, but always into the kettle. At each dip the candles grew on the long row of strings called wicks from a little film to the round, white things that were in time large enough to cool and lay away to adorn candlesticks later, and give what puny light they were capable of to the house otherwise in darkness.

Did they make candles in The Church? Who did? How strange! They did no such thing in its church—but in the Bible?—oh, yes; perhaps. Such queer things happened in the

Bible and so interesting. There never seemed to be any school in it. Moses set up the Tabernacle, whatever it might be:—the Child wished it had listened harder when the chapter was read instead of thinking of the garden:—and “thou shalt bring the candlestick and light the lamps thereof.” The Child remembered that. It knew what that meant. It sounded pleasant. The “lamps thereof” must be the little oil lamps with handles, that helped show the candlelight; for did it not say, “the lamps to be set in order” just as they had to be every day at home, filled and trimmed and set away on the mantel; and “the oil for light”? That came in a can and was kept in the closet. How funny to have it just so in the Bible! It was no longer a far-away, forbidding Book very full of “thou shalt nots.” It talked about just home things and one couldn’t help listening then. Well—it would see. Would the glory of the Lord fill the Tabernacle;—and could it mean The Church? Again the Child shivered; its lips trembled and anyone looking on might have seen to read, almost, by the shining of its eyes.

When the sun went down the wind ceased, and after supper the fire was covered, the cur-



tains were drawn, and the lamps turned low in preparation for the momentous event.

Holding by each hand the hand of one of its elders, the child stepped out into the unknown night,—a night alarmingly greater and more mysterious than one could know or even guess from the shelter of the trundle-bed. The stars were like precious stones dancing; yes, surely dancing around a pale, horned moon too cold to stir. A brown cloak wadded with wool, a brown hood with high crown and edged with swansdown, woolen stockings drawn carefully over the shoes, knitted red mittens and a red tippet—these were the Child's protection from the cruel cold, together with an unaccustomed veil that drew in and blurred with every breath, then froze and dimmed the lovely world. But one cannot have everything.

The three walked on in silence across the river bridge. The snow creaked, and under its burden the mill pond ice cracked with sudden fierceness, the sound trailing itself off into space. Branches of trees lay across the narrow path and made the way difficult. Often the Child had to be jumped over them by each arm; often it slipped despite the woolen stockings,

and once fell flat and had too much snow under the wrists of its mittens. But that was because it was not looking to see the way it went. Was that being *not good*?

The Church stood on a hill, difficult of access, like most good things. "A City set upon a hill," the Bible said. And "whither the tribes go up." Always up, up. Why? Were they, too, "tribes"? No, that would be funny and there was nothing funny in the Bible. Would the Lord "bring the glory of the nations" to it this night?

Did that mean the wise men and the shepherds? They died and went to Heaven long ago. But oh, oh, what did it all mean? Candles,—and in church!

The light blazed softly down, twinkling on a great space of snow about The Church. The Child looked up and saw a heavenly illumination, a candle at each window pane below the steeple where the bell was pealing joyously.

Dim figures, black against the intense whiteness, were climbing up and up. If only Abigail were there to speak to,—to let out what was too big for its sheath! But Abigail's people did not go to The Church. Theirs was a bare

whitewashed House of God, with no folderol tending alarmingly in the direction of Popery. Long after, on a school day, Abigail said virtuously she was glad she didn't go, though her eyes belied the words spoken in anger over some little difference of opinion.

The Child did not know that Abigail had been asked; neither did Abigail. People who were "broad" in countenancing certain things should not be encouraged.

Tall green trees stood at the entrance, and a flood of light poured out as the door opened revealing wondrous lights within, a cross of green above the altar, wreaths of green looped along the gallery's edge, silvery stars and red berries high and low. "The Lord shall come suddenly to his Temple." The words came of themselves from some unknown place and floated helplessly in the Child's half-comprehension. Was this the reason why The Church was decked for Our Lord's birthday in the hope that He might indeed come suddenly and be pleased,—be surprised, but certainly pleased that some of the people had remembered it?

Was it—oh, could it be He Himself in white robes, standing in the blaze of countless candles,

holding up His hands to bless?—Was the Child one of “the pure in heart”? And had the promised blessing come right here and now?

Tears of rapture fell; a sob choked, then another and another. To breathe was impossible. They burst, as the Child feared they must, in a subdued wail of uncontrollable spasm and mortification. Then a grave voice said, “Father, we ought not to have brought this child.”

The music rose and fell, angelic. The Child had no word to say. Its day had not yet dawned. What it felt can never be set down in words. But as it was led carefully home by one hand instead of two, the music pealing after—“Glory to God in the highest”—shaking the still air outside, the world was changed, the little horned moon clouded, the snow dull white, the icicles dim, pointed things, the trees unclothed spirits of a lost summer. Even the talked-of stocking to be hung by the chimney as a closing act of the eventful day meant nothing real, only one of the homely joys of a familiar home on earth to temper the unendurable Splendors of the imagined Next.

## THE CHILD'S CHRISTMAS

LONG before daybreak the Child woke suddenly. There was nothing but weird silence in the world until the tall clock in the hall whirred and struck five slowly and grudgingly.

The Child slipped out of its little trundle-bed and felt its way cautiously to the chimney. In the fireplace between the tall andirons ashes were heaped over last night's embers, and only a flickering ghost of warmth separated it from the chilly room. The Child groped for the stocking, past the cold handles of shovel and tongs, and with trembling hands and a sudden stoppage of the heart that leaped again, took it down from its nail and tucked it under the bed-clothes to keep it warm and safe till morning. But very gently, for it was an unearthly stocking, big and bulging, and with something tied on the outside. Oh, the exquisite mystery hidden in that queer parcel! Sunshine, and swallow flights, and moonlight weird and ghostly; bobolinks in the meadow, whippoorwills on the fence rail, flowers and bees and

butterflies, and the water lapping on the garden wall—all the entrancing delights of life.

No more sleep forever, the Child thought. Like Mrs. Browning's poet, its eyes

held too much light

Between its eyelids and the night.

But sleep that has its own unhindered way came all too soon and lingered all too long in the land of queer dreams quite until breakfast time.

And so much to be done! Company coming to the three o'clock dinner, evergreen wreaths to be made, the beautiful table to be set, and the pleasant sound of bustle all through the house; the bringing in of huge logs, the great parlor fire to be laid, with pine cones for quick kindling—cones which the Child with Abigail had sought for and found and piled in baskets all the week.

The mysterious stocking must wait for breakfast which was not of the least consequence nor honored in the observance; but law was law, and hungry, or filled with food the others knew not of, one must accept conventions, and supply fuel to life's unconscious and inconvenient furnace.



And it was *Our Lord's Birthday*, for which no gift had been provided! Only once had there been set before Him gold and frankincense and myrrh. In the home were cinnamon and cloves and spicy nutmegs, but these went to the making of rare mince pies and were only human things.

So with the stocking still waiting, the Child thought and thought. For one should always do things for others first; certainly if it was for Our Lord. Thinking hard it opened its own little treasure box and took out its own little red-covered Testament, and laid it carefully away on the top shelf in the parlor—the choice room. Then it found by searching a small bit of holly with one berry, dropped from the table adornments, and a gummy twig of pine, and laid them carefully on its cover, to add to the deep significance of The Day. He would know! But would He care for it when He must know it all by heart? All about Himself, too? The Child cared and it knew a good deal of it also. And the things about us are always the most interesting things there are. Besides it seemed the only suitable thing in the world to give.



It made a warm glow at the Child's center of life not fed by material fuel. Then—the stocking which had lain carefully tucked up all this time. The square outside package being untied revealed Miss Martineau's enchanting *Norway and the Norwegians*, or *Feats on the Fjord*, for the joy of days to come. On the very top of all the gifts a piece of charcoal wrapped in cotton! Then a mysterious thing with fold after fold of blue paper and pink paper and common brown paper, each tied securely with blue and pink strings; and in the very middle a yellow gourd, with seeds inside that rattled. Another package and out rolled a red apple, polished like gold. Then a mysterious box wrapped, and tied, and sealed across the strings with red sealing wax beautiful to behold. The Child shook it softly, and held it up to one ear; but it made no sign. A thimble!—a real, silver thimble! and with initials! The long seam to sew on Saturdays would be pure delight with this.

Another parcel held many sticks of winter-green candy striped with red; and a large, round pill box was just crowded with tiny peppermints, red and white. In a long box

reaching quite to the stocking's heel was a clay pipe for soap bubbles, with initials in ink along its stem to make it personal; and away down at the toe were seeds for next summer's garden—real morning glories, and four o'clocks, and ladies' slippers, and johnny-jump-ups, and marigolds; the air grew full of their individual perfumes.

Soon came the long sleighride over the creaking, squealing snow, with chiming bells, a long string of them, after the minister and his wife; the Child tucked down quite out of sight; the odor of roast goose as the home Dutch door opened to the welcome guests; the unwinding of wraps, the stamping off of snow, the thawing out before the fire; the beauty and cheer of the table, and the long, long, solemn blessing.

And after the dinner, stories; real stories of the good old days, and of bears and wolves, too, to make one shiver contentedly before the fire.

The minister's wife brought the Child a tiny, jointed, wooden doll in a pink silk frock—a doll that could not only bend its legs and arms and sit up, but could kneel down as well—a very proper doll considering.

At last came the good-nights, the wishes for many, many as Merry Christmases, and oh, wonder! a kind, priestly hand laid on the Child's curly head with a special benediction all its own to help it be good. Then the long ride again—moonlight this time and solemnly beautiful; a treat half disapproved by the wisdom of the elders but allowed because it was Christmas evening—the sound of bells chiming far and farther away through dreams of summer time and all out-of-doors,—the awakening in unsuspected night, the wide-eyed going to bed because it was the custom, when nothing seemed less desirable. And just as the snug tucking in was finished, a gentle voice saying:

“I found your little red Testament, child, away up on the top shelf in the parlor with a gummy piece of pine that might make the cover sticky. I don't know how it came there, but I took it down and put it back again in your little box.”

*Would He care?*

## THE CHILD'S TWO MYSTERIES

**FIRST** of all, the mystery of birth. Abigail said with confidence that her brother told her that the nurse who took care of her when she was a wee, *wee* baby, found her under a currant bush in the garden.

But why should the nurse be looking around under the currant bushes in Abigail's garden? Her house was far away, up the river. Abigail didn't know, but thought they were always looking for them. Perhaps because it was their business to take care of them till the mother learned how.

But why should people who had a home of their own, and things to eat and to wear, go around looking up babies for other mothers, instead of keeping them for their own? Then Abigail said they got money for it. But anybody would rather have a baby than money. The nurse just rolled her up in her apron, she said, and ran with her quick into the house; and her mother said first thing, "Why nurse!—have you brought me a baby? Well, if it's a

little girl baby I'll try to take care of it, for the boys are getting very big and we're all out of babies."

The Child, on the other hand, thought babies were found under rose bushes; for far, far away, and long, long ago, she had a dim memory of being told so. And babies' cheeks were so soft and pink, just like rose leaves, it seemed much more true. The Child longed for a baby, and it was years before it could pass a rose bush, specially a thick one, without searching—harking for a tiny cry. It would roll the little Being up in its own warm apron, just as Abigail's nurse had in hers, and run home to Mother who would be sure to say, "We will keep this baby!"—*or wouldn't she?* Then what?

Abigail said all babies were made of the dust of the earth, just like Adam in the Bible, and that was why they had to be washed and washed and washed till they were pink as anything. Water always made things soft, too, and that was why they couldn't stand up or sit up even till people stopped washing them; just as a mud pie wouldn't hold together till it had been made a long time and got dry.

But the Child couldn't accept everything from Abigail. She often listened to the older people reading aloud, when they thought she was just playing with the dressed-up kitten, and once she heard,

Trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From Heaven which is our home.

There were many things in the Child's world that science had not yet flattened out—made common and profane.

One always heard of babies in the morning. But it was not reasonable to believe that they would come in the dark night, crying and afraid. It was on those lovely morning clouds that they would come trailing glory; oh, so early, when the world was all still and the sun down below the edge of it, and the clouds might just roll down from Heaven and tip them off by a rose bush where the flowers were so sweet with all the dew on them.

And did they have wings to help them down softly?—wings that slipped off when no longer needed?

There were some queer, black creatures in the garden once, buzzing round and round and



making a great tumult with their wings. And these wings fell off after awhile and left just plain ants running around on legs. Might babies be made on something such a plan, but oh, ever so much nicer? For God could do everything—everything.

The Child never asked, but thought on and on. And as with thinking the wings did not seem reasonable they were dismissed.

The second mystery was death. An old, old man had died, something like an hundred years old; half at least, somebody had said. How hard to live so long and have nothing to play with! And the next morning it was read in the Bible that Elijah went up in a chariot of fire. That was the way the clouds looked that night; huge horses prancing and a great golden something rolling up and up above the sun as it went down; and all around a lovely, rosy light like flames on the hearth when the fire was piled high. It was glorious to go that way. To be very old and very tired, and then to have a beautiful angel carry one in his arms to such a swift rolling thing, and go straight up through the blue sky, above the sun to where God sat watching over every one.



The two, Abigail and the Child, sat often in the garden discussing these things, or dipping their feet in the water over the stone wall that hemmed them in, and watching the clouds and the sunsets.

One thing was always a puzzle: Where did the angels get their robes? Abigail's mother knew a dressmaker who died. Those must be the ones who make the angels' clothes. It wouldn't be much trouble, she said; just two long, straight seams that anybody could do; no sleeves. Sometimes she wondered what shoemakers would do in heaven. Angels always flew barefooted in the pictures. Probably their feet didn't get cold in such a pleasant place, nor dusty on clean, golden streets, and they could tuck them up at night in their long robes. But there were so many, many of them! Where could they ever get so much white cloth? Could there be heavenly looms somewhere weaving, weaving? Perhaps it would be out of doors, under pleasant trees with "all manner of fruits."

Suddenly Abigail had a thought that earthly garments might be resurrected too, and be all clean and white like resurrected bodies. But

it was such a far-away thought. There was another that was nearer. Why did little children die, and mothers too? For sometimes mothers did die, even if children prayed and cried as hard as they could.

Abigail said it was all for the best, and often God gave them other mothers. But why, the Child wondered, when the right one was there, all grown, and knowing just how to make all their clothes, and hear their prayers when they went to bed, and make them mind. And it seemed such a pity, too, when babies had just come down from Heaven to take them back again, just as if it had been a mistake. Abigail said when she went up to Heaven she was going to ask God first thing. She always was a brave girl. But she didn't like to ask her mother.

## THE CHILD'S EDEN

THE Child was in its seventh year, and the Garden, twelve times as old, was on the island. The House also was on the same island, and was the place where the Child ate and slept and obeyed. But its life was in the Garden.

The House faced a pond, and two bridges bound it and the Garden to the World. By the lower bridge stood the old mill; and when its gate was raised a flood of water boiled and twisted down to a smooth gravel bed below, and then floated quietly to the Garden's foot. Over against the upper bridge a mighty dam held the island from destruction. When the pond back of it was full the water poured in a smooth, green stream over it, and was dashed into spray and foam and torn to shreds on the jagged rocks below.

In summer time when there had been but little rainfall the great timber of the dam was bare, and the Child, when no one was looking, could walk fearfully across, between the line of water shelving to the right and the black mass

of sheer rock at the left. Then it was that the Child could climb over the low stone wall that kept the Garden in, and go down among the jewel-weed and stramonium and clawing black-berry vines that took toll of gown and apron, and explore the pools and bottomless pits in the river bed. The water always stood in these, dark and still, however severe the drought; and no stick ever sounded the depth of the largest of them.

So it must have been bottomless, like some of the fearful things one heard read on Sundays in Scripture. And though the Child, with the hair of its flesh standing up, dropped in stones, and even reached down an arm's length, and brought longer sticks, and tried them again and again, the deep pool was a kind of sacred mystery for ever. If the Child had not been alone, if it had had a brother, one fascination of its seventh year must have been lost.

There were holes without number in the bed of this stream, and sharp-pointed rocks; so that when the pond above was full it was a grand torrent that foamed roaring to the harbor, where it found the quiet mill stream curling round the Garden's foot. A steep bank at the

right shut the river from the world, and so made it the Child's own for ever.

On the pond, made classic as Windermere by song, geese floated double in the long summer days, and lent enchantment, and birds nested in the elms that dipped their branches in the water, and bees hummed in the clover. Then the expanse narrowed, and a simple river met it, creeping along by the highway, floating between two guardian churches with tall steeples, under a long bridge, and so through the town to the mill and dam.

The Child's thought went backward with it, always starting at the foot of the Garden. The stream bore an Indian name, and might have had its source in the midst of campfires and wigwams, and birch-bark canoes, and frightful war-whoops and tomahawks, perhaps a mile, possibly two miles away. Miles were vague measures, like time.

There were two lesser things in the Child's life; the Mill and the Dame School. The first belonged to an old, old man, like those persons who lived before the flood, whose hat and hair and coat and eyebrows were always white; yes, and his boots, and whatever else he wore.

There was a soft, rumbling kind of silence always within the mill, where the hoppers made little whirlpools of dusty grain, going down and down and down; and the Child leaned over with a thrill tingling its whole body, and knew that itself could be drawn down and down and down into the wide, floury bags below, choked and lost for ever. The soft dust filled the air and softened the sunlight and whitened the cobwebs among the rafters, and it was all something apart from the World and the Garden.

The second thing was the Dame School, where a very old lady, years older than the miller, kept ten prisoners on an upper floor of her own house, from nine till twelve, and from one till four, every day but Saturday. The Child did not then know that liberty was only sweet when bought with a great price.

Every morning as the clock paused on the stroke of nine, the Dame folded her hands and prayed, sitting upright like Buddha, while her Captives knelt, each in its place. At the right hand of the Image stood the best girl of the school, nine years old, perfect in word and deed and called Monitor, who walked around on tip-toe and rapped on the head with the ferrule any



culprit who peeped out. It was a diabolic plot, not fully appreciated at the time by the prisoners; for who could hear the stealthy approach of Calamity and blindly wait, not knowing which way to dodge? So heaven alone had the benefit of the morning prayer.

All day long, winter and summer, summer and winter, like Eternity, the Child thought, little hands knitted and sewed, with book always in lap. The daily "stent" was marked by the Fate in cap and spectacles, sitting in a high armchair, and no child left the room till its task was perfectly finished.

The spelling-class of six stood with toes on a crack of the wide floor board nearest the teacher, where her long arm, like Justice's, could reach any offender, and where nothing could be hidden from her all-seeing eye. The first Child in the row named "Baker" and spelled it; the second named "Shady" and spelled it; the third named "Lady" and spelled it; the fourth named "Tidy" and spelled it. But if Number Two, twisting nervous fingers in her apron, named "Lady" instead of "Shady," her fingers were rapped for moving, and she was disgraced and sent to the foot. For order



stood on a level with accuracy at this tribunal. There was no Figure Five on a half-inch square of paper for Number Two that day to hoard in her pasteboard match-box; no drink from the tin dipper, however parched the little lips might be. For these precious Figure Fives had to be parted with, one for every drink of brackish water that stood in a wooden pail in the entry. Five Fives were exchangeable at long periods for one Ten; ten Tens for a two-inch Reward of Merit. The Child alone was not dazzled at sight of even the final Reward gained at such loss and pain, but drank its fill daily and wondered at the others. Sometimes it wondered also if the warm, tinny taste of the water drawn from a well too near the sea had any connection with the Reward.

The miller's daughter, Abigail, a thin, lint-haired child, with pale blue eyes, knitted long stockings for her tall brother, who was a man. The Child thought of him as Saul, he stood so much higher than his brethren. One day when the long stocking had grown by painful half inches nearly to the toe, the sharp eyes of Dame Fate discovered a dropped stitch in the beginning of the leg, and raveled it all out from

bottom to top. Tears for little Abigail, and no Figure Five!

The heart of the Child was hot within its bosom as it saw fall one after one the pink and blue and yellow and red yarn-marks like mile-stones all along the way—marks knitted in by the teacher's bony fingers and tied in hard knots on the wrong side; marks never to be removed save by the mistress-hand when the task was done. It seemed like a waste of life. But Abigail took up her weary "bouts" again, with the patience of despair.

Every other Saturday morning school kept, that Satan might not have too much verge and opportunity, and the Catechism was ground into the tough fiber of memory in place of other tasks. But the sewing and knitting kept on. At one of these every-others, the Child looked out between the two lengths of window-curtain, and saw a shaggy dog bounding in and out of the water, and laughed softly to itself. But Dame Fate, whose eyes were everywhere beholding the evil, spied the crime, pinned the curtains closer together, set two sharp thumbs in the hollows of the small shoulders, shook the Child dizzy, and turned its back to the school,

where it learned, as an extra task, "The Lord is my shepherd." It was the old-fashioned way of teaching children to love the Bible.

The Catechism question for the day was, "Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?" And the answer, "The-sinfulness-of-that-estate-whereinto-man-fell-consists-in-the-guilt-of-Adam's-first-sin-the-want-of-original-righteousness-and-the-corruption-of-his-whole-nature-which-is-commonly-called-original-sin-together-with-all-actual-transgressions-which-proceed-from-it."

But the Child was far away. Even the whimpering of the A B C babes under the ferule for rustling about did not bring tears as usual, for its eyes were set on green pastures where little white lambs kicked up their free heels, and mother-sheep took no notice, but nibbled and ba-a-d all day long, as if there were no harm in it. The leading-beside-still-waters made quite another picture, but might it not be done by some older, wiser playmate with a string, to keep the Child safely on shore between river and meeting mill stream, where chip-vessels would float and dip and veer distractedly, go under, and rise again? The paths of

righteousness took thought, but might they not be those that led from porch to garden-gate, where one never disobeyed, or ran outside of bounds—never but once?

That was last year, when November winds were bleak, and the Child, at Abigail's beckoning across the mill-stream, strayed out and to the lower bridge in a vagrant way, looking for Something, neither child knew what. So they stopped at the Gentle Lady's door and asked to see the squirrels in the whirling cage that smelt warm and foreigny, and fed them with hickory nuts; and Time went on. Then they took hold of hands, and ran and ran and ran, swinging down the hill, and the Child fell in the sand at the bottom and knew it would never breathe again.

Then they strolled across the way to the Queer House with sanded floor, where the Child slipped and fell, and the miller's daughter, who had been there before, snatched up the unusual guest, shook off the sand, and went on to the dark, low room where the Queer Lady, like her of Shallot, weaved all day long and cared for nothing else. She wore a strange woolen gown, coarse of texture—for the Child took a

pinch of a stray fold—that left bare a bony neck except for a snuffy kerchief twisted about it. The Child saw a blue-check apron, too, and great felt slippers on the treadle, and a few gray hairs screwed into a tight little knot, small as a filbert, beneath a black cap.

The two watched the shuttle and the web and heard the clang of the loom as long as it was new; and when they moved to go the weaver opened her thin lips for the first time and said they might pick up quinces in her garden, for there was going to be a frost by night. So the two Simple Ones picked up cold quinces till the daylight was gone; and there was no more Time for them than if they had been Angels in the Sun. But that night when the wind shrieked and the Child lay with a swollen, throbbing throat, never knowing before what Night was like, all the sorrows of the transgressor piled their weight on its hot head, and it cried out in awe of the Unknown, like a certain pious little Queen-to-be, “I will be good.”

For had not the mother searched every nook and corner in House and Garden, and sent the miller’s son to drag the pond, just as a shivering little figure in blue gingham came loitering

in sight, with a burnt ginger-cookie in the purple fist that did not grasp the sunbonnet, and tight little heartstrings that conscience was tugging at? But these last did not show.

The Dame School in summer time held one only joy. It was the thought of hot July and August days, when the clouds piled up like woolly mountains, and lightnings streaked the sky. Then the Fate of the armchair, impelled by something mysterious and invisible, stopped work, stepped down, and gently shepherded her willing flock to a room across the hallway with one green-paper-darkened window and a high feather bed.

Any child was allowed to share the Bed of Safety with the Dame, whose dignity gave way before the God of Thunder, but there was not even a tradition that in the dark past ages any child had so demeaned itself as to accept the privilege.

The least ones played softly behind the one high-backed chair, while the elders crawled under the bed and whispered made-up stories, and came out linty and feathery when the storm was over, without a touch of the ferrule even



from the Dame, who sat cowed in the middle of the bed, a deposed and scepterless queen.

And so all her small flock reveled in storm and thunder, and never knew what fear was, except to despise its image when they saw it.

The days went on and on, but the foolishness called school could not last for ever, and the Garden, like a reliable friend, was always waiting. It was the most wonderful Garden! When Scripture was read in the house on still Sabbath mornings, it stood for that First Garden—then and always afterwards, for fifty years and more.

The high wall to the right, across the river, covered with tall grass and hardy shrubs and a tree or two, was the place where the Almighty stood and called to disobedient Adam. And the Angel with the Flaming Sword had his own place behind the greening apple tree that was proxy to the Fall and that shaded the chicken yard.

And when the Immortal Two went hand in hand barefooted out of Eden, they paced slowly past the rows of corn and potatoes and poles of beans, to the stone wall. There fancy left them to fade into thin air. The Beyond was hidden, even to the Child.



Not that the Child observed the practical Garden much, only that Adam and Eve must pass in the direction of the Voice, and facts were stubborn but possible things. This portion of the Garden had no interest for the Child, who simply knew that a man came at times, and dug and planted and hoed, when his presence was an intrusion.

It saw, dimly, green things sprouting, growing tall, climbing, blossoming, fading. Flowers, too, had their place; great clumps of peonies, hollyhocks loved of bumblebees, tall lilacs with sweet clusters of purple and white, and grapevines with blossoms infinitely sweeter that could not be picked—though they seemed to bear no natural relation to the purple fruit that came in the autumn. But law was law.

And there were beds of sweet alyssum and mignonette and masses of pinks that burst their bonds and fell over the border, a rain of sweetness; just old-fashioned pink pinks.

From the house porch with two windows and a wide hall door looking out under heavy eyebrows—two eyes and a long nose, the Child thought—ran a little crooked path to the Garden. It stopped at the well, then bent around

over a great flat rock, up and up, then down again, wavering through rough places, but always keeping its end in view, the Garden gate.

One long summer's day, a Saturday, when school did not keep, the Child, who was heartily tired of shoes and stockings, begged to go bare-footed to the Garden, and stoutly waived all elderly objections. So a tardy consent was gained, and the pink-and-white feet started bravely from the shelter of the porch, hesitated a fraction of a second by the well, and went slowly on. Some one who always knew best said the stones would hurt. They didn't—much. That they would cut; perhaps make the blood come. The Child screwed up its mouth, held tight by its sunbonnet strings, and walked on its heels and the outer edges of its feet. Then it stood on one foot, and curled up the other against the ankle of the standing one. But what if some "force of nature" should be looking from the porch window?

The tiny seed Deceit dropped into barren ground. For just ahead bloomed a royal bunch of catnip, a most luxuriant growth with the dew of the morning scarcely off its gray velvet leaves. The little feet were hot and sore, but

the pursed-up mouth was resolute as ever. Once on the stone wall with a certainty of dipping both feet, of splashing in the water on the still side, of pressing it down and having it push back again—what joy! One foot brushed the tender tops of the catnip bunch, then both settled firmly down. But in its treacherous deeps a bumblebee was quietly breakfasting, and his sudden resentment was cruel. If he could have known! But the Universe is arranged on such an awkward plan. There was one sharp, frightened-to-death scream, and the Child was picked up with the bee still clinging to the toe. It meant hours of pain, with a dizzy foot on a cushion, and the sad lesson learned, like most, alas! with too great suffering, that elders always know best.

So that day was lost. And everything in nature went on just the same.

Church days came often, when the mornings were so still and long, and "Pilgrim's Progress" was often read aloud before the walk to the House of God. The tabby cat purred softly and stretched lazy claws on the grass at the sunny side of the porch. The air vibrated gently to the shock of falling water. Remote

wheels, sounding near at hand, rolled leisurely up the hill, and here and there large and small figures by twos and threes followed the leadings of the bells. There was no hop, skip, and jump on the holy day. The Child was led softly by the hand with a bonnet tied beneath its chin and best shoes on its prim feet; shoes that pinched a little, for there was time to grow between the Lord's Days. But this was never mentioned, as they were pretty shoes, set apart and dedicated to the occasion, belonging to the sacredness of the day. And pain in some unknown way belonged to good things.

The river all along the road ran softly as that of the Prothalamion; but the birds just shouted and were not ashamed. All things else held themselves in reverently.

The pews of the white church had high seats and straight backs: the prayers and hymns were long, and the preaching a sleepy mystery. If the deacon's wife had not now and then passed over the back of the pew a plump head of spreading caraway or arrowy dill, if a real church mouse had not peeped from under the footstool and kept expectation on the stretch, the hours must have been long indeed. Some-

times a joyful thunderstorm, bursting with old-fashioned fury, broke up the services, and people gathered in awe-struck knots to whisper stories of lightning strokes not meant for little ears but quite unheeded by Dame-scholars. The dripping home in the rain was fun enough for a week day. After the solemn dinner came hymns and "Pilgrim's Progress," but neither doll, story-book, nor Garden. The secular part of the Catechism was slowly spelled out in the long hours to the solemn ticking of a tall clock in the corner.

"In Adam's Fall  
We sinned all."

"Thy life to mend  
This Book attend."

"The Cat doth play  
And after slay."

"The Dog will bite  
A thief at night."

"Job feels the Rod,  
Yet blesses God."

"The idle fool  
Is whipped at school."

—which was in some way connected with Job's punishment in the Child's small mind.

"The Eagle's flight  
Is out of sight."

"As runs the Glass  
Man's life doth pass."

"Zaccheus he  
Did climb the tree  
His Lord to see."

"Proud Korah's troop  
Was swallowed up."

"Young Obadiah,  
David, Josiah,  
All were pious."

"Xerxes the Great did die,  
And so must you and I"—

which singled Xerxes out from the great, vague world full of alarming people, yet in some way lowered him to the Child's comprehension, and brought day-dreams of his glory.

If only the Garden days might have been half so long! What journeys might the Child have taken, sitting solitary on the stone wall above the flat rock that sloped to the deep water, and looking across to Harbor Woods. Many a time had Xerxes rounded the Point this side the Gulf with a fleet of glorified fishing smacks and purple banners. Red-white-and-blue streamed everywhere from the Conquering Ship, and a Band in the bow played Xerxes's favorite tunes,



while the Commander waved his crown of gold and jewels toward the shore, and his yellow hair and velvet robes streamed in the wind. It was at the high point where the Almighty spoke to Adam in the Garden that the vessels always anchored, and Xerxes proudly knelt and kissed the wet sand, holding a gold cross as tall as himself, which was very tall, and naming the land. Well, perhaps it was not Xerxes; the thing only signified, and the vision and the glory were the Child's.

And sometimes the Crusaders, young and old, came singing across the Gulf like a heavenly choir, and the Child waited with a beating heart and moist eyes to see them round the Point, all in white, with red crosses on their garments and harps in their hands. Many a time it dashed away the blinding tears lest they should come suddenly and be dim in its sight. Abigail said it was nothing but the men and boys digging clams the other side of the rock. So the Child did not tell Abigail what she heard any more.

One day when the Child sat on the low wall built up of stones taken from the Garden, looking across the mill-stream, it saw Abigail coming with shoes and stockings gathered up in



her apron, and knew that she dared come across. What if the great gate should be lifted up, and the flood come boiling down and sweep the bold girl away to the harbor and on to the sea, rolling and tossing like a dry leaf or a chip boat, shoes and stockings and all? Who in all the world could save her, and what would become of her soul unless she was prepared to die?

But Abigail came softly across, for the expected does not happen; and the water covered her feet and crisped up around her ankles. But it seemed really much deeper, because she held her skirts so high and walked delicately, like Agag before the Great King. That was because of the stones that hurt her feet. Soon she scrambled up beside the Child and dangled her wet feet in the sun until such time as she could put on her shoes and stockings and play house. The Child never cared for a little square of ground fenced in with small stones, nor for a house built of corncobs, or of twigs and straws like a bird's nest; nor for bits of pink and blue broken china carefully washed and stood on a shingle shelf balanced on two stones. She did not care for sand pies and mud gingerbread baked in the sun, nor for dolls made of a stick

and a pocket handkerchief. But unlike many wiser and older folk, she was willing to let Abigail enjoy herself in her chosen way, if only left free to think her own thoughts and choose her own pleasures.

And once while Abigail puttered about her house and scolded her children, shaking them well, and whisked up the floor with a bunch of limp grass, the Child, always looking for Something, saw the miller's other son coming to the flat rock in his father's dory. And then the children saw that he was stepping a mast into the boat, made of a broken oar, and tying a bit of red and white shawl to it for a sail.

"Where are you goin'?" asked Abigail.

"Oh, somewhere," the Boy said. "Get in, both of you, and you'll know."

"Won't you tip us over?" asked the Child.

"No; not if you don't look," the Boy said tentatively. "I want you girls to shut your eyes tight, honor bright, and not open them till I say 'Now!' "

"Is it most to Harbor Woods?" asked Abigail as the waves curled softly about the bow and rippled away.

"Hush up!" said the Boy manfully.

"But where are we?" the Child persisted; and the Boy was silent, like his kind.

"Better not go out in the Gulf," said Abigail again, for it was her own brother, accustomed to feminine advice.

The Oracle rocked the boat gently, and the passengers clutched the gunwale.

But the Child did not speak. Its eyes were shining under their screwed-up lids, and its breath came with thrills that tingled down to its feet.

They must be at Harbor Woods now—around the Point—out in the Gulf, that green place of awful deeps. Oh, where were they going? The strain was too great. But would he tip them over if they looked? He had said, honor bright, no, if they didn't look. The Child could scarcely breathe now. She thought it was like Death; that fearful thing that comes and stops one's breath, and that even a mother cannot forbid, nor shield one from. The Child was too young to know that it was already in Eternity, hemmed in by Time, and that the Soul may go out softly in death as in dreams.

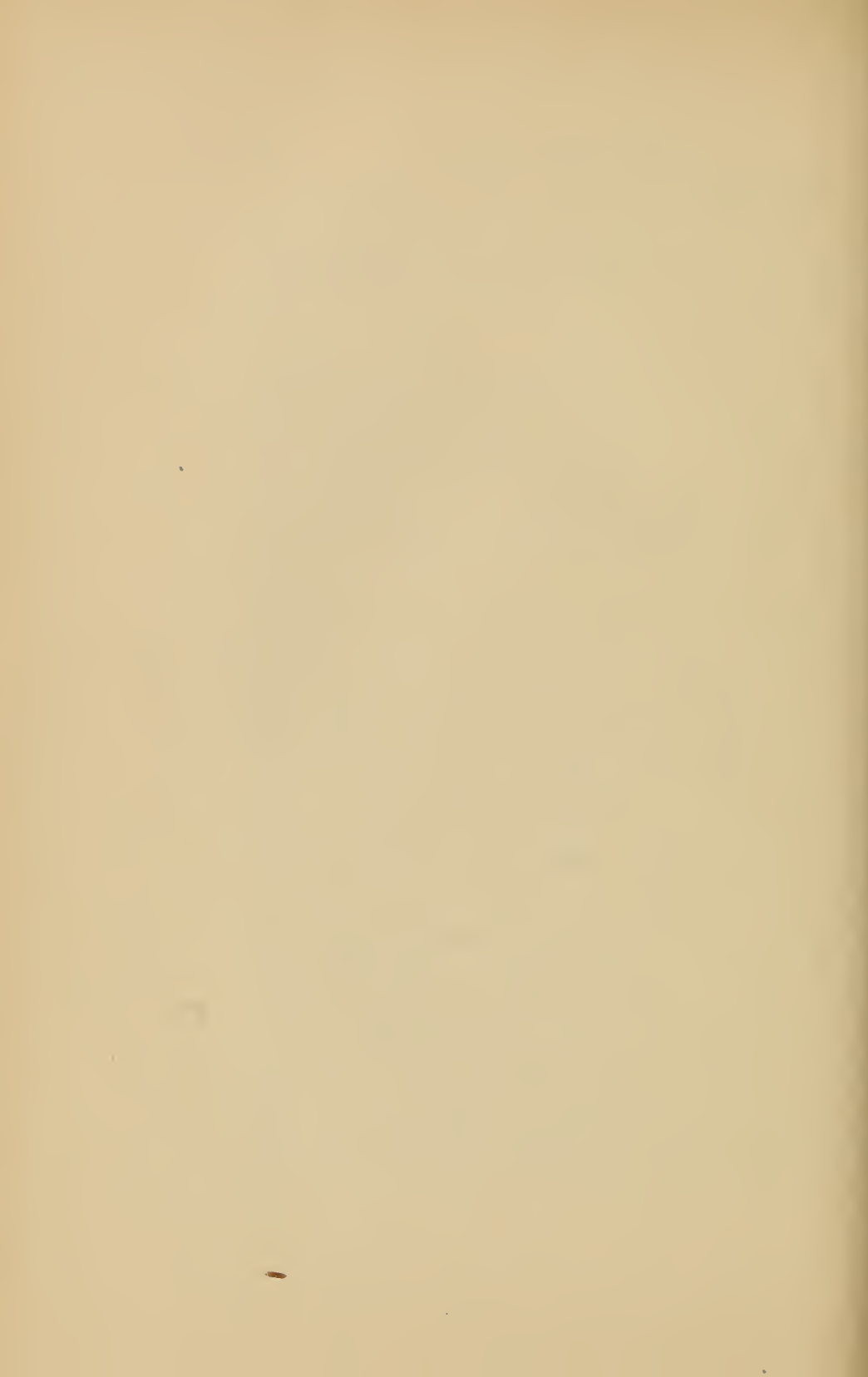
They were going through the great, green Gulf of the Unknown Ocean. And with a sail!

The Child knew it must cry out in time—very soon—“Oh, mother, mother!” The first cry and the last of helpless humanity launched on Unknown tides.

“Now!” said the Boy.

The boat grated on the sand, the children opened dazed eyes, and dimly saw—their own flat rock, their own stone wall, The Garden.

If the Child were to go back to the Garden after fifty years, would it sit on the stone wall and dip its feet in the water, pushing it down until it pushed back, and look out to Harbor Woods for Xerxes and the Crusaders? Why not? And if the big timber of the mighty dam has shrunk with the years like the miller, and the breadth of the fall narrowed that a man may leap across it; if the bottomless pits can be sounded with a little longer stick, and the path from the porch is only a sheep-walk up a hand's-breadth rise of rock and down again; if the height from which the Almighty called to Adam has a house on it, and the apple tree is bowed and mossy with age; if the Garden itself, like the British Islands, is shrinking from the sea; what matters it, if only the years have left the heart of the Child?



TWENTIETH CENTURY STORIES





## HOW DICKON CLIMBED WITH A HOE

**T**WO happy children, Dickon and Kathinka, raced and shouted till they were quite worn out. For this was their first day in the country since last summer, and when dinner time came they had only just begun to see the things they loved.

Last year the gray squirrels ran along the window ledges, and bowed with their little paws clasped to their breasts, like courtly gentlemen of long ago; and gratefully ate the nuts tossed to them, after tucking them away in their cheeks till they could glide up to a dead limb of the spruce tree that was in full sight from the west window.

There was a small gable—the least little gable—built out of the barn roof for the squirrels' front door, just where the furry creatures had gnawed a hole through the shingles the year before.

Many a time the children had climbed to the hayloft to hunt for the nests; but on this day

bright eyes glanced at them from a hollow under a pile of old boards, and Dick saw the tip of a bushy, gray tail.

Then wise little Kathinka said: "Let's climb down, Dickon, for maybe they'll run clear away when they see how big you are."

This was Dick's first-trousers summer, and it pleased him to make squirrels afraid, and to have Kathinka really believe that he could do it. So they ran down to the lamb pen; and Dickon went down on his hands and knees in the young grass and blue violets and gold dandelions, and put his mouth right into the spring that gurgled up at the root of the oak tree, in the middle of the pen.

Kathinka was filling her apron with flowers, in the neat little way she had, never jerking them up, roots, dirt and all, when suddenly she gave a quick *sh—sh*, and Dickon looked up with the water dripping from his chin all over his clean blouse, to see a little gray bird flitting away into the alders just outside. One little *quip* of the wings and she was gone. Gone into the swamp corner where a little trickle of shiny brook ran away from the spring, and made the redwings in the alders sing from morning till

night, in pure joy of living and drinking and bathing close to their nests.

They were shouting *oor-da-lee* at the very top of their voices now, and their red shoulders made a pretty show against their black velvet feathers as they played at hide-and-seek among the trees.

Then the children crawled slowly about in the grass, hunting for birds' nests. And soon, under a little sprout of apple tree, with dried grass pulled up around it, they came upon that joy and wonder—a song-sparrow's nest, with four speckly eggs.

Dickon put out a gentle finger—"just to touch one, Kath"; but Little Sister said, "No; the mother-bird might go away and leave the eggs if people even looked too hard at them."

So the two cautiously drew the dry grass well around the nest again, and tiptoed away, and tied the gate, after they had latched it, with a bit of dingy twine from Dick's pocket, so that no one—no one—could get in to disturb the precious eggs.

A hundred feet down the cliff behind the pen and the alders, Long Island Sound lay asleep, a glittering sea of glass, and on it one shining

white sail stood still, with a shining white image of itself reaching upside down into the water below.

But the children had nothing to do with sails this busy morning. For five minutes, or perhaps six, they lay quite still under the great old apple tree in the orchard, looking at a robin's egg that Dickon had found in the grass. There were two square holes in its sides, and no hope of a baby robin. Kathinka knew well enough that a wicked squirrel did it, though she hadn't the heart to spoil Dickon's faith in the pretty creatures; and just then a beautiful gray fellow with a bushy tail raced along the stone wall and made a great, curving leap into the tree.

"There's a nest way up there; I can see it," said Kathinka, with trouble in her voice. "And oh, Dickon, he's going to eat the other eggs, and oh, what shall we do?"

"Throw stones at him," said Dick, cheerfully. "I've got a lot in my pocket down under the strings. Pretty ones, but I don't care."

"But you might hit the nest."

"I'll go up and push him off!" cried Dick, in the manfulness of first trousers.

"You simply can't," wailed Kathinka. "You'd fall and break—break everything!"

"Can't. Haven't got anything to break. Give us a push, Kath."

Little Sister pushed till she was red in the face, and Dick scrambled till his foot found a knot-hole; but even then the lowest branch was far away, and there was nothing to get hold of.

"Oh, come down," said wise Little Sister, "and we'll think about it."

The squirrel watched from above, whisking his banner of a tail and scolding at his enemies who were in such haste to save the eggs that they couldn't think of a way.

"Run, Dickon," said Kathinka at last; "run just as quick as ever you can go to the barn and get the hoe. I'll watch."

"And hoe him down, Kath? You can't."

"Oh, do hurry and I'll tell you. Run!"

So Dickon ran and brought the hoe; and when his foot scraping along the bark found the knot-hole, Kathinka held up the hoe until he could sit on it, and pushed with all her might. And Dickon reached and reached, and caught a green twig that held; and Kathy pushed and pushed, and stood on tiptoe with

an ache in her back and two in her arms and two in her legs; and finally the great old limb let itself be caught, and the small boy was safely up. Carefully he reached to the next branch, and scrambled up to the nest, and the small sister below was very red in the face with joy and pushing; longing to go herself, and afraid for Dickon.

And then such a shout came from among the apple blossoms, as if the green apples themselves were creeping out and crying for joy: "Oh, Kath, get us a worm,—a worm quick! Four baby robins,—mouths all ready for a worm. Get four."

"I can't, oh, I can't, Dick. I simply can't get it up to you, and there isn't one."

"Dig it with the hoe, Kath, and put them all on it, same as you did me, and oh, do hurry up!"

Kathinka was eager to help and to let Dick have all the glory; but between her fears for him and the bigness of the hoe, she made very slow work. Then Dick called in alarm, "The mother robin! oh, oh, where's the hoe for me?"

And down he came but not the way he went up. For not only had the mother-bird shrieked



when she saw her nest in danger—"Robins haven't a speck of sense," Kathinka said—but other robins came from far and near all of a sudden, till the air seemed thick with them, and cried, and flew so fast before his eyes, and beat him so with their wings that it was hard for Dick to see between them where the hoe ought to be.

Two children, very warm and red in the face, lay down in the grass and watched for the squirrel, when the birds hushed and those who had come in as good neighbors had gone about their own affairs. Both had scratched hands, and one had a bruised knee and torn first trousers, and a big rag of stocking hanging over one shoe.

But the squirrel had escaped on a friendly limb and was far away, traveling along some beautiful, airy pathway of his own, dropping from branch to branch, or gliding like flickering light in and out of the dark leaves.

When the dinner horn sounded, two grimy, tired little children went hand in hand, both troubled in their minds—one about torn trousers and stocking, but that wasn't Dick—and two about the robin's nest; yet ready to



spend the whole afternoon hunting for horse-hairs, and sheep's wool that the good creatures left sticking to the briers, and all the soft things that were nice to line nests and save the birds trouble in this busy, busy season.

Dinner was just begun, and the two roast chickens looked small indeed—it was so very long since breakfast—when Grandfather said: “Children, have you seen that hoe anywhere around? Jim has hunted and searched for it, and I shall have to send him to town for another if he doesn't find it soon.”

Kathinka looked wildly at Dick, and two great tears that she hadn't time to stop dropped on her hands.

But Dickon said: “Ho, Kath! what you crying for? We climbed the tree with it, Gran'pa, to catch the squirrel that went for the robins' eggs, only they'd hatched out hungry.”

“Climbed the tree with it?” said Grandfather, laying down his carving knife. “Climbed the tree with a hoe? Where was the ladder? There, there, little girl, don't cry about it. You'd better laugh like the rest of us. Why, Grandmother and I'll climb trees with a hoe if you and Dick will show us how.”

## HOW DICKON MADE A BIRD'S NEST

ONE bright morning Kathinka had a headache and Dickon was left to his own devices. For a while he climbed about the veranda where Little Sister sat in a chair much too wide for her, with a blue sofa pillow for a headrest, played horse with two strings tied to the railing, and pranced and reared and shied at a hen lately escaped from its coop, as it *ca-ca-ed* past, looking hopefully for a worm.

But there were large thoughts in the small boy's heart, and this foolish sort of activity left empty spaces in his brain.

The sun was creeping around to the south veranda, and as Kathinka had had too much of its heat the day before, she took her blue pillow and went slowly out to the hammock under the pear trees, and Dick felt free. Now was his chance. Down in the orchard, out of sight of Little Sister, he gathered five or six crooked twigs, and pulled from his pocket an end of rope, a handful of horsehairs, a ball of putty,

a few gray-and-white feathers with one black one, and a bit of wool. This last he had carefully clipped from the back of an unsuspecting sheep with Kathy's scissors, and carried about for days, intent on his secret purpose.

First he pushed the ends of the twigs into the ground and wound them carefully with the horsehairs and bits of string until they began to show design. "Just as good as anybody's nest," he whispered; but when he tried to lift it to see if it would be safe for eggs, some twigs stuck, and some let go too soon, and Dickon had to begin all over again.

He was very warm, for he had chosen a sunny spot on the birds' account, and little streams of perspiration kept getting into his eyes, along with the ends of his yellow curls. So, as the brook was not far away, he left his work and went down to cool his face and hands. He saw at once that it was a happy thought, because here a new idea struck him. Why not make mud-mortar and plaster the 'nest? Dickon never wasted time on second thoughts, so with both hands full of leaky material which would keep dripping all the way on his clean blue linen trousers, he toiled up the hill, slipping

down a few times and losing his treasure, but cheerfully gathering it up again with grass and sticks added. When once his mind was set on a thing, he was not the boy to be discouraged by trifles.

It was a wretched little nest to keep in shape. How the birds ever contrived to do it without hands was a hopeless mystery. Dickon wondered how the nests all seemed to come round, and tried putting his fat fist inside, which shaped this one somewhat. The brook-mud held things together pretty well, for the sun was baking it as fast as possible; and when the rope-end was frayed to a soft lining material, and the gray-and-white feathers with the one black one, and bits of wool were stuck in here and there, Dickon stood off with his hands in his pockets and viewed it with unspeakable rapture. It was his first real creation. Some old Bible verses came into his mind about the world when it was made and how its Maker called it good. He didn't wonder in the least.

Only one thing remained—the best kept till the last. It was a snake skin that he drew up from the very bottom of his pocket—a happy find that he came across while looking for trout

in the brook. It seemed as if the snake must have known, and left it on the edge of the water just for him. He remembered that some birds put snake skins in their nests, and if some, why not all?

Then he drew handfuls of long grass and weeds around his hope of the future, laid a stone on them to make sure that the wind did not whisk them off, planted a few sprigs broken from the bushes near by, to make believe that small trees were growing to shelter his nest, and started to find his bird.

"If I catch the right one," thought Dickon, rubbing his hands dry on trousers that would not keep clean, "he will lay his own eggs; but if I should get a father-bird—maybe he'd sing and the other one would come to see who was singing, and maybe—"

It was a hopeful idea and Dick had an elastic spirit.

The wood-thrush was piping *liber-tee*, and far off in the woods the oven-bird called *whicher-whicher-whicher* as if he couldn't wait for an answer, and a little song-sparrow tilted on the very tiptop of an alder where it had to flutter its wings, first one and then the other,

to stay on long enough to finish saying, *quis quis ka dee,—ka daisee ka daisy*.

Dickon heard and not heard, and fell down several times in his hot haste to remember where he dropped the butterfly net yesterday and so be able to get it before the birds suspected him. A flock of them hopped along the cart path doing nothing in particular—just waiting, Dick thought, as he dashed to the barn for the net. It was not there. Neither was it on the fence by the lamb pen—a long way to go with the birds right there; nor in the kitchen, nor under the well spout where he threw it down to take a big drink from the dipper. Oh, where was that mean net!

Dickon hopped up and down in raging fear lest the birds should be gone. "Not anywhere in this mortal world!" he cried out in hot anger at the unreasonableness of things, rubbing two muddy fists in two damp eyes.

"I'll go ask Kath."

This was the last resort, but Little Sister had such a headache that he still might get everything arranged before she was able to come out. Kathinka guessed it was in the bin



down cellar where they found the russet apples, and Dick forgot his indignation against it when he had once grasped its bamboo handle and dashed out of hearing of Little Sister, who was calling weakly, "Don't, Dick, till I come! Here's a lovely yellow butterfly."

Oh, joy! The birds were still there. It seemed as if they must have respected his work and waited to do their share. But no, this could not be, or else they mistook his intention, for at the first sweep of the net they frisked out of reach. Then Dickon used strategy. There were crumbs of ginger cookies and some rather dry bits of angle worms in his other pocket with the fishhooks, and after placing them skillfully, he had the exquisite joy of hearing a flutter of wings inside his net, at the fourth throw. "Poor birdie," he said coaxingly, as he gathered up the folds about it, "poor birdie—I've got a good little, new little nest down here in the grass just made for you. I like it and you will too. Come on."

There was nothing else to do, so the bird came on, and Dickon laid the net carefully over the nest, securing it with stones on the outer



edges where it touched the ground, and drawing it down so that the bird must be very stupid not to see at a glance what was expected of it. Still it fluttered and did not take as kindly to its home as it should. "Do sit down!" said Dick decidedly. "Everybody has to get used to a new house. You can because you must. That's what Mamma always says. Why, we little chicks have to get used to Gran'pa's every year. You'll like it, same way we do."

Then, seeing that his bird was secure though foolishly unreconciled to its pretty home, off he raced for Kathinka and an umbrella to shield her from the sun.

Little Sister, astonished but willing, and all alert for a secret, held her head with both hands and staggered along under Dick's shade, which was irregular owing to his great heart-beats. When at length he allowed her one peep and told the whole charming epic in a breath, Kathinka turned white.

"Why Dickonsie—*poor* little boy," she faltered kindly; "it's a horrid old English sparrow! Didn't you see his breastpin? I don't believe he *ever* lays eggs—just fights."

And Dickon wept.

Not coward tears such as come when a boy is hurt, but drops from the deep well of our common human nature, pressed upward only when its choicest springs are choked.

## DICKON GOES A-FISHING

“SAY, Kath,” whispered Dick as he left the breakfast table, “would you?”

“Would you what?”

“Tell Gra’mother we’re going to have trouts for supper.”

“Oh, Dick,” Little Sister whispered back, for the others were scarcely out of hearing, “you haven’t got them yet, you know.”

“But we’re going to get them now, and if we don’t tell she’ll go buy something.”

“Well, you can tell her,” said Kathinka, “if you want to, but I should wait.”

“Oh, goosie! Then she’ll go and get something big, maybe, and you have to eat trouts quick. That’s what Rob and Teddy said, and they know. You take your pail, and I’ll get mine if I can find it. But they’re so little—say, Kath, why can’t we take the pear basket too?”

“I don’t think we ought,” Little Sister said, considering the matter. “This isn’t exactly our home, you know—and they might want it, and besides it would smell of the fishes.”

"They smell good!" said Dickon stoutly. "And besides, I'm going to put grape leaves in the bottom."

"I'm going to put some moss in my pail," said kind Little Sister, "so it will be real soft for them, and some water too, and they won't know they're caught, maybe."

"I can't find my pail, Kath, so I'll just tell Maggie I took the basket."

"Did you?" asked careful Little Sister, as Dick ran on to overtake her two minutes later.

"Well, I didn't see her; but I shouted it into the kitchen door."

"Maybe she wasn't there."

"But she ought to be. I can't help where she is, can I?"

Kathinka was not quite clear in her own mind. It seemed almost unfair to take the pear basket without asking; but then, Grandfather had driven away to town, and the men were down in the meadow, too busy to be looking after pears. It seemed to Little Sister that she always had to be thinking about things.

This time the two started for the trout pond a long half-mile away. The sun was hot and the grape leaves in the basket grew soft, which

Dick said was a good thing, adding that he would dip them in the water to make them stiff again.

How pretty the shadows were on the pond, and how cool it was under the trees after the long, dusty walk! Kathinka had brought bits of bread for her hook, and when they came to the pond she chose a stone a little way off from Dick's, because she couldn't bear to see him put bait on the hook.

"I wish you'd take the bread too," said Kathinka, "because then you could sit by me and see every time I got a fish—and take it off from the hook," she added softly.

"I will pretty soon," said Dickon, "for I couldn't find but just two worms in the garden, I was in such an awful hurry. Don't use up all the bread."

"Oh, no!" said Kathinka, a little hurt, "you know I wouldn't do such a mean thing."

"Well, you might forget," said Dick. "I'll sit close up by you, and you look the other way when the worm wriggles. I'll say *now*. *Now!*"

"Oh, Dick, seems as if I couldn't bear it," cringed little Kathinka, with both hands over her ears.

"Oh, silly! they don't squeal," said Dick. "Teddy says they just love it."

"That was in fun, because he knew it made me feel bad. He meant they loved the worms, but I wish they didn't. Sometimes I can't eat my supper when I think about it."

"Well, you won't feel bad any more when you see what I get. Hello, there! help, Kath; help pull. I've got a bite as big as a whale!"

Both children tugged with might and main, and Dick's joy was boundless. "Down with the traitor," he shouted, "up with the—" but just then his line gave way and Dick struck the back of his head. It was on a bank of ferns and moss, and didn't hurt, only he was a good deal surprised until he got his bearings.

"Don't let go of him, Kath," he cried. "Hold on and I'll wade in."

"I am holding on," said Little Sister, "because I can't let go. It isn't anything but a rail, Dick, and we've pulled one end up out of water."

"Pshaw!" cried Dickon. "Any old rail ought to know better than to put itself into a good trout pond. And I haven't got any more

hooks, 'cept just one bent one in my pocket. Can't you jerk it out?—your one, I mean."

"No," said Kathinka, "I can't."

"See here," said Dick, after thinking carefully, "I'll put my old hook onto the other string, and maybe I can hook out the other hook with the bent hook, if the fishes haven't got it. It had a good lot of bait on. I wish I had some strings. Why, you can't get your string, can you?"

"No," said Little Sister, thinking fast, "but you've got shoestrings."

"Good for you!" shouted Dickon, whipping them out of the eyelets in hot haste. "I'll take one, and you just bend up a pin and put on the other."

But it was of no use. The fish had other business on hand, and made slow processions past the two inviting hooks that dangled from the bank in what was fast becoming a hopeless way.

"If we were afraid of them I do believe they'd climb up and bite us," said Kathinka.

"That's so," said Dickon heartily. "I'm tired. Let's lie down and think. They'll come fast enough when we don't want 'em. See the



flock of sheep—the flock of sheep!” cried Dick, rolling about on the bank and forgetting his disappointment. “A whole big lamb field. See!”

Far above in the exquisite blue of the heavens white clouds moved slowly like sheep and lambs, flock on flock, from the tops of the trees to the very dome of the sky.

“And there’s a searchlight—a great big searchlight—see; right on the bow of a big, big ship. I guess they’re looking for more lambs up there, but they’ll scare them off. Look quick! all in among the little lambs—a great long streak.”

“What shall we do for supper?” sighed Kathinka. “Gra’mother will be so disappointed.”

“That’s all right,” said Dick contentedly; “I didn’t have time to tell her.”

“But I did,” said Kathinka, “when you went to dig bait in the garden.”

“All right,” said Dickon, rolling over. “Try, try again; that’s what we’ll do.”

“But I can’t see any fishes now, Dick. We’ve scared them all away.”

“That’s so,” said Dickon solemnly. “Mustn’t

talk when we go a-fishing. Rob and Teddy said so."

"And we talked a lot. Oh, Dicky!"

"Maybe they're scared into the brook, and we'll go catch them there. Let's take off our shoes and stockings and crawl along 'side of the road where they can't see us, and not say a word, Kath."

"But we'll get all dusty, Dickon."

"Much Gra'mother'll care when she sees the basket and the pail! And I'll get a long stick to string the rest on, long enough for both of us to carry. You take one end and I the other. And I'll take the basket because that's heavy, and you take the pail. I guess we'll have to kill the fishes, or the top ones'll flop out."

"I shan't," said Little Sister. "And I shan't look if you do. Why, you've got your stockings and shoes off. I guess I'll keep mine on, Dicky."

"No fair. We've just got to go still. If they see a teenty little shadow, or hear a little creak, they'll hide. I know their tricks, but they won't fool me any more."

Good Little Sister had a great many bits of bread, and both children were glad to sit down

after their dusty crawl and cool their feet in the grass. Kathinka had stepped on a blackberry vine with cruel pricklers, but didn't mention it; and Dickon had torn his sleeve, which seemed unworthy of mention. The brook went gurgling over the stones, taking its own time; and the little fishes nibbled at Dick's hook and sniffed at Kathinka's bent pin, following the splash of each with eagerness up stream and down.

Now and then Dickon's line was carried along for an inch or so, and two small hearts beat with great thumps. Dickon signaled silently for bread, more bread, which Kathinka gave lavishly, and the little fish fairly swarmed about the ends of the shoestrings.

"No foolish things here!" whispered Dickon, whose talk had been long pent up. "Might just as well talk out loud. They won't run for us, whatever we do. They like us, I do believe. Maybe they're lonesome."

And in truth they seemed attached to the children, for wherever they threw their lines, up stream or down, there went the happy, wriggling swarm of fishes. Their tails pointed out, and their heads turned to the center, so

that they made pretty figures of themselves, like stars or Catherine wheels. The brook was quite alive with them, and still they kept coming from far away.

"But they're so little," Little Sister complained. "Not much bigger than a pin."

"They have to be little at first," argued Dickon stoutly. "Like chickens and birds. And some of mine are big as my jackknife. See that fellow now!"

"Not so fat, though," insisted Kathinka.

"They'll get fatter all the time."

"But nobody could cook such little ones."

"Maggie could," said Dickon. "Don't you remember that day when Gra'mother said she fried the pan-fish all together so's they looked like a big fish? And I had a whole lot of little tails on my plate, and Gran'father laughed? What's the matter doing these ones that way?"

"We'll have to get as much as a hundred," said tired Little Sister.

"Course! Ten times a hundred," said Dickon. "Basket full and pail full, and a big, long stick full. I'll go get one now."

"Dicky, I do believe I hear the dinner horn!"

"Hurry up, you silly trouts!" cried Dickon,

with a great splash of bread in the water. "You know I can't go home till I hook you!"

"But we'll have to," said Little Sister, "or dinner'll be all over, and Gra'mother'll be worried."

"Well," said Dickon resignedly, "I s'pose we must, and I'm pretty hungry too; but let's leave all our things and come again right after dinner."

Dickon's face was shining with happy hopes, but Kathinka pulled on her stockings fast and said: "I tell you, Dicky, if 'twasn't for you and Gra'mother, I think I'd rather ride in the hay cart this afternoon."

## GRANDMOTHER'S COSSET-LAMB STORY

A CRUEL rain washed all the beauty out of the apple blossoms, and kept the children and most of the birds indoors. But the oriole and wood-thrush sang bravely, for they loved the wet weather, and knew that they had built strong nests. So that when the wind came roaring up from the Sound and whitecaps danced on every wave, and all the little boats scudded to shelter, the oriole's nest swung from the elm tree, and his voice was strong and clear as the wood-thrush's.

But Kathinka and Dickon were under as snug shelter as the little birds hidden under the leaves. All day they played in the great, old garret, with its big beams and dusty little windows; hiding behind barrels and low chests, whirling the big spinning wheel and the little flax wheel, playing school with queer, broken-backed chairs, and dancing hand in hand before cracked mirrors.

But before tea time the wind whistled around

the chimney with such a homesick sound that Dickon said he didn't feel very well.

"I think Gra'mother wants to see us," said Little Sister. "She'll be lonesome, too." Kathinka started to say homesick, but the other seemed the more comforting word.

There was a great fire on the sitting-room hearth, and the room looked cosy enough. No doubt Gra'mother did want to see the children, for she put a mark in her book and laid it on the table as soon as she heard them open the door. Dickon sat down on the floor and looked into the fire, while Kathinka hung about Gra'mother's chair and asked if she couldn't help. She could hold a skein of yarn to be wound, or put sticks on the fire. But Dickon threw himself on the rug and wanted a story, to make him forget that his real home was so many miles away, and that Rob and Teddy could not come till school closed. He didn't even say Father and Mother to himself, for that might have started a tear or two, and a boy in trousers is too big to cry.

"I wish I knew about the cosset-lamb again," he said.

"Why, it's such an old story."



"I don't care. I like old things," Dickon said.  
"You're real old, Gra'mother."

"Yes," Gra'mother said, "and I'm glad you like me."

"Oh, Dickon!" said polite Little Sister; but Dickon was looking absently into the fire and his thoughts were years away. He was trying hard to think how queer Gra'mother must have looked when she was little enough to play with a cosset-lamb.

"But we love the story, don't we, Dick?" said Kathinka. So Gra'mother began without any urging.

"When I was a little girl—" "About as big as me," Dickon put in, "only you had to have dresses:"—"my father gave me a cosset-lamb."

"I wish I had a cosset-lamb," said Dickon.  
"What is a cosset-lamb?"

"A lamb that hasn't any mother."

"Why hasn't it any mother?"

"Oh, Dickon, you know!" said Kathinka.  
"I don't want to hear about it again, and Gra'mother doesn't want to tell. It 'most makes me cry."

"But I mean other cosset-lambs," said Dickon. "They don't all get killed."

"This one was very young," said Gra'mother, "when its mother died. We had to feed the little fellow with milk for a long time."

"And he wiggled his little tail," put in Dickon.

"Yes, dear; he wiggled his little tail when he drank the warm milk. You remember the story pretty well. As soon as he was strong on his legs he would run after me like a little puppy."

"Puppies wiggle their tails," said Dickon. "I wish I had a little puppy to wiggle his tail."

"Cossy had something even better than a puppy to run after him. It was a little lonesome chicken that wandered away from its home and came to us."

"Where was its home, Gra'mother?"

"We didn't know, or we could have sent it back."

"And the chicken didn't know either?"

"No."

"Why didn't the chicken know?"

"That I can't tell you, but it was very small, and its mother never found it."

"Why was it better than a puppy?"

"One reason was, that it never barked and frightened the little lamb as a puppy would."

"And what was two reasons?"

"It stayed with Cossy, and was company for him. And a puppy would have been running off to play. When the lamb nibbled grass, his chicken would keep close to him and pick up worms and jump for flies that were disturbed as they went along. But at night it got sleepy first, and would go *pe-up, pe-up, pe-up* after Cossy, who was wide awake and capering about, till at last it was so tired trying to keep up that it would fly up on his back and go to sleep with its head tucked under its wing and its feet snug and warm in Cossy's wool."

"Tell it again!" said Dickon.

"Oh, no," said Kathinka. "We know all that; please go on, Gra'mother."

"Well, one day I took Cossy for a walk, to see a little cousin about as old as I was, who lived almost a mile away."

"Cossy's cousin?" asked Dickon.

"No, my own cousin. And Cossy was so happy to be going with me that he capered—"

"And crowed," said Dickon.

"—And ran and jumped till I was afraid I should lose him."

"But you wouldn't lose him, Gra'mother; it would be him losing himself."

"—So I fastened his ribbon to my bonnet string after I had tied it in a hard knot under my chin. You see he had a blue ribbon around his neck and my sunbonnet had gingham strings that were very strong, so I thought he couldn't get away. He was quite a big lamb then, and I was a fat little girl. He pulled pretty hard, but I kept my hand on his neck, for I had to run to keep up with him, till we came to a steep path over a sand bank hill. The road was a long way below, and the path was almost on the edge of the bank."

"What made you go up there, Gra'mother?"

"Partly because Cossy wanted to."

"And partly what else?"

"Because I was a silly little girl, and always let Cossy have his own way."

"Silly little girl!" quoted Dickon. "Oh, Kath!"

"But if I had been a little boy I think I should have been just as silly."

"P'raps sillier," said Kathinka gently, hurt a little at Dick's laugh.

—“And suddenly Cossy thought he would caper off the bank without asking me.”

“How could he ask you?” said Kathinka.

“He couldn’t very well, but he might have stopped if he had been polite, to see which way I wanted to go.”

“That’s so,” said Dickon.

—“My breath was nearly gone trying to keep up, and as he plunged off the edge of the bank, I rolled over and over, and my bonnet string tore off, and away went Cos.”

“Did he come back again, Gra’mother?”

“Oh, yes. When he saw me lying on the ground he trotted back and put his nose close down to my face as if he felt sorry.”

“I think he did,” said Little Sister. “I should.”

“Where is Cossy now, Gra’mother?”

“He grew up to be a big sheep, and when his horns came he liked to butt people.”

“And then what?”

“He had to be killed; don’t you remember?”

“Oh-h!” exclaimed Dickon, who knew the story by heart. “I guess he was sorry enough then that he was bad.”

"He wasn't bad," said Kathinka, "because that was the way he was made."

"But he ought to have tried not to butt," said Dickon. "Boys can't do the way they want to,—hardly ever," he added. "I wish I had a cossy. I'd put him in the pen where the bird's nest is, and not let him butt it; and he wouldn't be lonesome a bit."

"We'll ask Grandfather to save a little lamb for you, if any of the mothers die," said Gra'mother; "but you would have to feed it very often at first, and never forget, and be very kind to it."

"Dickon is always kind," said good Little Sister.

THE END









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